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# ANSDALE HALL;

OR,

"STAND BY YOUR COLORS."

BY

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# A N S D A L E H A L L ;

OR,

“STAND BY YOUR COLORS.”



## CHAPTER I.

*RICHARD'S MOTTO.*

IT was a lovely evening in August, and the last red beams of sunlight were stealing softly through the fresh muslin curtains into Aunt Martha's cozy sitting-room, lighting up her care-worn face as she rested in her great easy-chair, and tinging her silvery locks with gold. Aunt Martha had suffered from one of her painful nervous headaches all that long summer day, and the pain was passing away with the daylight.

So, at her desire, Richard had wheeled the great chair from her darkened bed-room to the cheerful western window, while I, with arms clasped around her waist, had supported her dizzy steps and seated her comfortably among the soft cushions. Then, placing myself on a little stool at her feet,—the stool she had covered for me with her own hands long years before,—I leaned my head against her knee, while she softly stroked back my hair. Richard, meanwhile, careless boy, had measured his length on the floor, pushing back the fresh muslin curtain for a better view of the sunset.

“Richard!” said my aunt reproachfully; and Richard with a heavy sigh let fall the light screen between the lovely picture and his admiring eyes, rather than make the exertion of carefully fastening it back.

Poor Richard! I pitied him that night. He had enjoyed his vacation so much; he had had such a flow of joyous spirits

throughout it, and now they had fallen far below zero ; for Saturday night and Monday morning were so near together, and all the morning he had been superintending the packing of his little trunk ; and he was to start, the first of September, on his return to school. And I must confess that quite half my kindly sympathy was expended on myself ; for, whether Aunt Martha agreed or no, Richard was the light of the old home to me, — Richard, my precious, only brother.

And so I was thinking, as I sat by Aunt Martha's knee, watching the great red globe sinking behind the distant tree-tops, until it seemed to drop slowly behind the mountains which border the grand old Hudson.

At length Aunt Martha laid her hand on mine : “ Can you see to read something to us, dear ? ” she said. “ I never get time to read now, my head aches so often.”

I took a little book from the table, a book our dear old pastor had given me only two days before. Aunt Martha closed her eyes in quiet content; Richard rose and looped back the curtain, and I read, —

“ ’Tis not for man to trifle ; time is short,  
And sin is here ;  
Our life is but the falling of a leaf,  
A dropping tear.  
We have no time to sport away the hours ;  
All must be earnest in a world like ours.

“ Not many lives, but only one, have we,  
One, only one, — ”

“ I suppose we know that. Never mind the rest ; you needn’t finish it,” said Aunt Martha rather pettishly. “ I don’t see why you read such gloomy things. What good can they do you ? Don’t read them to me. You know I don’t like them, for I never care to be reminded that life is short ; and I don’t see the need of doing it. Why do you read them ? ”

“ You *have* rather odd fancies, little May-

bird," said Richard, with a merry twinkle in his eye; "tell me why you read such effusions as these."

I blushed at this, and closed the book without another word; for I was a very weak disciple, a second Peter, over-fearful of confessing my Lord.

"Why?" he repeated, glancing slyly at me.

"Why—I like them, I suppose," I stammered forth in answer, pulling my ring up and down on my finger, and keeping my eyes on the ground; for I could never bear to have Richard laugh at me.

"A very poor reason, I'm sure," he said, turning to look into my eyes with a smile; "and you seem rather uncertain about it. How is it; do you pass for a Methodist, May-bird? I wouldn't if I were you. I'd "put a veto on it," as old Reynolds would say, only I like to have you

different from other people, — with a little spice of oddity, you know.”

“ *I don’t,*” said Aunt Martha decidedly. “ *I want Bertie to do as I bid her. What is the name of that book, my child ?* ”

Richard took up the book from the table, where I had placed it, and read, — “ *Ryle’s Spiritual Songs.* ”

“ *Then, my dear,*” said my aunt, “ *you will please give ‘ Ryle’s Spiritual Songs ’ to me, and read such books as I saw with you yesterday. I want you to be my own little Bertie again.* ”

“ *But, auntie, I’ll keep it all to myself,*” I pleaded, timidly.

“ *Why do you want it ?* ” she asked.

I hesitated, thinking how I should answer.

“ *Pshaw ! auntie, let her have it,*” cried Richard ; “ *it will make me wretched if you don’t, and I’m sure you wouldn’t add a feather to the burden on my heart. Only*



one more evening at home ;” and he sighed dolefully.

Aunt Martha relented, and leaned back wearily in her chair. In spite of all the trouble he gave her, she did love Richard dearly, and he knew it.

“ You must study hard, Richard,” she said ; “ Christmas won’t be long in coming.”

“ That’s consoling,” groaned Richard ; “ sweeten my midsummer dreams with thoughts of Christmas ! Bribe me to give up my peaches in the hope of enjoying mince-pie ! ”

Aunt Martha smiled.

“ You and Bertha may leave me a little while,” she said, “ for a pleasant twilight walk. You must enjoy all the time you have at home.”

“ That’s a brilliant idea, Aunt Martha,” cried Richard, springing to his feet. “ The very thing I want,—a walk with Bertha once again. I shall have no little May-

bird to walk with this night week. Come, Bertie."

I rose, kissed Aunt Martha, caught my sun-bonnet from the table, and joyfully followed in Richard's footsteps. We passed out through the little porch, under the grape-arbor, and along the graveled path, arm in arm, my brother and I.

The sun had already set, and the new moon had traveled over half her nightly path, while the weary little birds, with sleepy chirps, were hieing away to their nests.

As Richard turned to close the gate, Aunt Martha was leaning forward in her chair to kiss her hand from the window. As we walked through the gathering twilight we fell to talking of her, the dear old lady, — my mother's aunt, — who had taken her little orphans under her wing when our mother died, ten years before, — of a broken heart and a blighted hope, the neigh-

bors used to say. I don't know how that may have been ; I only know that ten years before, and while we were still living in our old English home, our father had sailed for India in a British man-of-war, and that, when she heard of his sudden death, she had hastened to leave her adopted country, and to place us safely under Aunt Martha's care. Then I remember how she faded day by day, and became like a little child again in her childhood's home, leaning on Aunt Martha for comfort and care ; and leaning too, I know, on a stronger Arm, and one more able to guide her.

Richard had a beautiful miniature of her, taken for my father, but unintentionally left by him when he sailed for India ; and our mother in dying had fastened it around his neck. Richard always wore it, though hidden from sight, and we often talked over it together. It was taken at the time of my mother's marriage ; and inclosed in its

case was a soft golden curl, which Richard used to assert matched my own.

So Aunt Martha had taken care of us for ten years ; had learned to love us too, I think, and had certainly won love in return. We had never cared for another home than hers ; nor did we feel at all aggrieved when the neighbors, for the sake of convenience perhaps, always called us by her name. So we said nothing unpleasant of Aunt Martha in our twilight walk, but were intent on extolling her virtues.

Suddenly, as we turned the road by Ans-  
dale Hall, the finest old mansion in the  
place, Richard asked me abruptly, " Ber-  
tie, are you a Christian ? "

I started, blushed, and answered rather  
timidly, " I hope so."

Richard whistled, and walked on silently  
for a little while ; then he smiled in a  
strange way, and turned to look into my  
face.

"You're only a timid little soldier, at best, Bertie," he said, "and it's a pity not to let you have a smooth road."

I looked up at him in a questioning way, with an unpleasant consciousness that I had not proved a very brave soldier that evening.

"Isn't that what they call Christians?" he said carelessly, stooping to pick up for me a branch of red leaves which had dropped into the road; "'the soldiers of the cross?' I have heard that name used somewhere. What do they fight for, Bertie?"

"They should fight against sin for Jesus' sake," I answered, almost under my breath.

"I guess it's the best thing, after all," he said musingly; "the best kind of fighting, I mean; and it's nothing to be ashamed of, May-bird;" and he looked down at me in a sad, tender way.

I saw in a moment what he meant, and that he would have stood up for any little party at school, to whatever disgrace it might have led, far better than I had done for this great cause of mine ; for it was just as natural for him to hold to what he professed as it is to the birds to sing ; and he would have liked very much to have me as courageous in all these things as himself. So I was heartily ashamed of *myself* now, and not of my " Captain."

" Never mind, Bertie," he said ; " I don't know anything about it."

" But," I answered with an effort, " I know I was a coward, Richard."

" And you're only a weak little thing, and can't be expected to fight," he said cheerfully, coming gradually out from his unusual fit of seriousness.

" But," I answered, " we none of us have our *own* strength to fight in ; and

there is just as much strength for me as for any one, if I only ask for it."

"How so?" he asked curiously.

"Why, Richie, you know our Captain will give it to all," I answered; "and 'his strength is made perfect in weakness.'"

We had reached the garden gate as I said this, and Richard took both my hands in his, and looked down into my face.

"You're a good little sister," he said kindly, "and I don't believe you are ashamed of your colors."

"I wish you would be one of those 'soldiers,' Richard," I said timidly; "I don't doubt you would stand by your colors."

"Nonsense," he cried lightly, letting my hands fall at once, and turning to open the gate. "See, Bertie, you will have a glorious moon in a day or two, when I shall be going away."

So Richard, having changed the subject entirely, led the way into the little sitting-

room again. No one was there but Huldah, however. Aunt Martha had gone back to her room, she told us, and wished to be alone; and she — Aunt Martha's maid-of-all-work — was setting the apartment "to rights," and would, as she kindly informed us, prefer our "room to our company."

"And how about supper?" asked Richard, as she shut the door upon us.

"If you wait long enough, you'll git it, like's not," she answered consolingly, showing her long wry face at the door.

"Yes, patience, Richie," I said; "everything comes by patience. Patience, and Christmas itself will be here, and that is better than supper."

"That's a nice little speech," said Richard patronizingly, as I slowly mounted the stairs to my little room overhead.

It was a very pleasant room, with a beautiful view from the window, of the



river and the mountains ; and there I used to sit and watch the sunset every evening when Richard was away from home, when I was lonely, and Aunt Martha resting below. But this evening the sun had set already, and even if it had not, I had something else on my mind, more momentous than watching the sky : that was, to place carefully in Richard's trunk the parting gift I had been preparing for him during so long a time and with so great secrecy. It was a little picture — painted under Aunt Martha's supervision, and copied from one that had belonged to my mother — of the little cottage in England where he and I were born. The place was very beautiful, but I remembered it indistinctly : the great maple-tree by the front piazza was more familiar to me than the house itself, for under its branches Richard and I had always played on every sunny day. And everything was faithfully portrayed in the pic-

ture,—even the rough brown bench where I had held my rag-baby, and he had spun his top. So I knew quite well that he would value it, for Richard had a better memory than I.

Stepping softly out of my room, I crossed the hall to Richard's sanctum, and raising some of the clothes at the top of his trunk, I placed it under them quite carefully, wishing all the while that I might see him when he found it.

“Bertha!” cried Huldah from the doorway, “don't you go to mussin' up your brother's box; do you hear? I've been to work putting the traps into it all the afternoon. Come, supper's ready.”

I dropped the lid of the trunk, and, passing Huldah, went down to the dining-room.

Richard was stretched on the sofa reading; and, walking quietly across the room, I peeped over his shoulder, and saw my

own little book, which had been the unconscious cause of so much annoyance that afternoon. He started as I touched his arm.

"I wasn't reading it, Bertie, on my honor. I was merely wondering how you could."

"But the hymns are lovely, Richie, some of them," I said.

"Sure it hasn't anything to do with rose-colored spectacles?" he asked.

"Listen, Richie;" and I read a verse from one of my favorites.

"It *is* rather pretty," he confessed. "The fact is, May-bird, to be candid with you, I didn't want to like them."

"Then you had no right to judge."

"No, I hadn't. But wait, Bertie; let me write something here." He opened the book at the fly-leaf, and taking out his pencil wrote something, and returned it to me.

I read four words in his clear, firm hand, —  
“ Stand by your colors.”

“ Thank you, Richie,” I murmured ; and he said no more on the subject. But that evening, when I opened my Bible, this verse met my eye : —

“ Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father’s, and of the holy angels.”



## CHAPTER II.

### *BLACKBERRYING.*

**R**ICHARD and I were both awake very early the next morning, and we met in the summer-house and had a quiet time together before breakfast. We were anxious that the day should prove a long one, but it seemed to pass very quickly. Aunt Martha's headache was too bad to allow her to leave her room, so we left her in the care of Huldah, and started a long time before the bells commenced to toll, that we might stroll leisurely to church ; but, slowly as we walked, there were only four who were earlier than we ; and Richard passed the time before service in cut-

ting his name on one of the hymn-book covers, while I vainly tried to stop him.

As we came out of church, Nelly Rayden, one of my dearest school-friends, touched me on the arm.

"Oh, Bertie!" she whispered, "Mr. Ansdale called on us last evening. He is so entertaining; and he has invited us all to dinner at the Hall. Only think of it!"

Everybody was curious about that tall, dignified gentleman at the Hall. I suppose it was owing to the fact that he had been in our little village for only one month, and seemed a stranger to every one, living all alone as he did, save his servants and housekeeper.

"Well, what of it, Nelly dear?" I answered; "I don't suppose he will extend his sociability to us." Nelly tossed her pretty head and kissed her hand in adieu; while Richie and I passed on. Richard's curiosity was excited, however.

“Who is he? and where did he sit in church?” he asked.

“I don’t think he was in church this morning,” I said, glancing around among the moving congregation. “As to who he is, I can’t enlighten you very much, as I have only seen him once myself; and,” I added, shaking off my timidity for a moment, and resolving to “stand by my colors,” “let us not talk about him to-day, Richie.”

“The dear little Quakeress! does she talk sermons and hymns all day Sunday?” cried Richard with a smile.

“No, Richie,” I answered, “but then I do wrong all the time; and we should not even think our own thoughts to-day.”

I had grown bold since the evening before; the weak disciple had asked for strength, and had received it.

Richie shrugged his shoulders. “We

must expect attacks when we are in the vicinity of soldiers," he said.

"Please don't make light of those things, Richie, when they are so serious," I pleaded.

Richard said no more, and neither of us resumed the subject during his stay; for he started early the following morning: so early that we had breakfast an hour before the usual time on his account. It seemed as if we could not let him go. The house was lonely without him; and Aunt Martha and Huldah fell back into their every-day mood as soon as the door closed on him, and did not regain their holiday spirits until the next vacation. Perhaps it was somewhat so with Bertha too, and she was far less excusable.

I stood on the piazza and watched him as he went, waving my handkerchief and kissing my hand, until not a trace of him was visible. It was a lovely morning,



bright and cool, and only six o'clock as yet ; most delightful for a walk, I thought ; but at the same time came the consciousness of rooms to be dusted, and — most neglected of all since Richie's arrival — an hour's practicing to go through. Moreover, I had commenced a cap for Aunt Martha Saturday morning, and must finish it that day, as Mr. and Mrs. Winsley, great friends of Aunt Martha, were coming to tea. I turned with a sigh and entered the door. My work was on the table in the sitting-room, and I laughed as I looked at it. Richie's hands had been there ; for the pure white lace was profusely ornamented with one of his neckties, a bright scarlet one, which I had repeatedly tried to convince him was altogether unseasonable in August ; and which he had left, pinned in festoons around Aunt Martha's delicate cap. While I was busy

restoring order, Aunt Martha herself entered.

“My dear,” she said kindly, “it is a lovely morning, and the sun is not very high yet; don’t you want to gather some blackberries for supper? Ah! you are busy at that cap, I see: never mind it, dear; you want exercise, and you can finish that when you come back. There are a great many berries about half a mile to the right, beyond the little pine wood, in among the rocks. Huldah saw them there Saturday. You are not out in the air enough,” said Aunt Martha, with a sigh.

I was only too delighted. I caught up my sun-bonnet, which was always at hand, and styled the “inseparable” by Richard, and started for the kitchen to get a basket.

“Be you starting for the blackberries?” asked Huldah, as she handed me the required article. “You’ll have to be mighty sharp and not get lost; for of all the twist

in's and turnin's that ever I saw, them rocks are the worst; I came nigh bein' lost myself."

"Don't be afraid, Huldah," I answered, laughing; "I fancy I know the way around our little village pretty well."

"You've never been to this part," she answered, turning again to her washing; "it's easy enough to find, but 'tan't so easy to see through."

Fully confident of my own powers, I picked my way through tubs and clothes-baskets out into the open air, and started on my journey.

It was a lovely path which I had to pass over, and no one was in it at that early hour but myself and the birds. I had ventured to the other side of the pine woods but once, though I had frequently been as far as the entrance, and fancied that that one glimpse of the region beyond had

made me fully acquainted with its mysteries.

The path was quite shady at first, and the morning air was cool ; but as I neared the wood the air became very oppressive, and I was exceedingly glad of the friendly shelter of the pines. That, however, was of short duration ; and as I reached the other side of the little group of trees and saw a long stretch of sunshine before me, I resolved to rest before I encountered it. Seating myself in the cool shade, on the root of one of the trees, I found that Richie had been there before me, and had been exercising his talent for carving, as the old forest patriarch informed me by displaying the name on his trunk,—“ Richard Norton, Aug. 28th, 1860.”

But resting here was not picking blackberries. The day was already becoming intensely warm ; what would it be in a few hours ? So I picked up my basket,

and most zealously attacked the nearest bush ; then I forgot the sun, — for I always had a passion for berry-picking, — and for an hour or more I wandered on from bush to bush without even glancing up to see where I was, and only noting the flight of time as the sun rose higher until his rays pierced even my cool white sun-bonnet. Finally my little basket was full ; it had taken long, as the berries were few and scattered.

“Now I will go home and display my spoils,” I said triumphantly.

I looked around, but not a landmark was to be seen. I was completely surrounded by rocks and bushes, as far as the shrubbery would allow my eyes to reach. I was lost and tired ; Huldah was right, after all, and I not so wise as I thought myself.

I wandered around from bush to bush, tearing my dress in a dozen places, climb-

ing the highest rocks to obtain a view of the situation, and heartily wishing Richie were with me. But all in vain; not even the low clump of pine-trees was in sight; and finally, completely exhausted, I seated myself in despair on a large stone, and began using my basket-cover very vigorously as a fan. So I sat for some minutes, and then I heard footsteps approaching: possibly my sun-bonnet served as a flag of distress, for they were directed toward myself. I found it was Mr. Ansdale, of the Hall, and I hoped sincerely he could give me some assistance. He smiled rather humorously, as he approached and saw my dubious face.

“Can’t you find any path through this labyrinth?” he asked pleasantly.

“No, sir; I would be very thankful if you would show me one;” and I lifted my precious basket and prepared to follow him.

“Let me have your basket first;” and he

took it from my arm. "I see you have been like the foolish little mouse, so intent on the cheese that you never stopped to think how you should escape from the trap when you had eaten it."

I laughed merrily.

"Never mind," he said, "you are not the first mouse of the season, I dare say. May I ask your name?"

"Bertha," I answered, still plodding on through the bushes, and tearing my dress at every second step.

He looked troubled at that. "Let me see, Bertha," he said; "how can we remedy that evil? Can't you walk on the rocks, and part company with these bushes?"

I tried the experiment, and it proved very successful.

"I think I have seen you before," he continued; "I am confident I have heard

of you. Isn't our good pastor greatly inclined to talk of his little Bertie?"

I knew he was, for he had no children of his own, and I had always been his pet and darling from a little child.

"I remember he has spoken of you several times, and he hinted to me the other day that you would be a pleasant visitor at the old Hall. So I am inclined to enter very unceremoniously on a close friendship. We have one common place of meeting, — one thing that should make us friends, little Bertie; we acknowledge one Master, one Lord, even Jesus of Nazareth." He spoke solemnly and gently, and in a sweet thrilling tone that went to my heart. "Can we meet there, Bertie?"

"Oh, yes, sir!" I answered warmly.

We walked on in silence for some time, until the pine wood appeared in the distance.

"Are you fond of study?" he asked.



“ Yes, sir, very fond.”

“ And you go to school ? ”

“ Yes, sir ; I shall begin in about three weeks.”

“ Will you come every morning until then and read history with me ? ”

“ If Aunt Martha is willing, I shall be delighted,” I answered.

“ You must ask her,” he said ; “ I shall expect you to-morrow morning, and we will lose ourselves in Macaulay, or any author you prefer, as a substitute for the rocks and bushes.”

“ A pleasant substitute,” I said readily, as I felt the broiling sun on my shoulders and the rough rocks under my feet.

The walk was over at last ; Mr. Ansdale parted from me as we turned the corner by the Hall, and I ran all the remainder of the way home.

“ Aunt Martha ! ” I cried, rushing into the sitting-room ; “ Aunt Martha — ”

Aunt Martha shuddered and raised her hand to her forehead.

“What made you so late, Bertie?” she asked; “Huldah was fearful you had lost your way.”

“And so I did, auntie,” I replied, setting my basket on the table. “Mr. Ansdale, of the Hall, found me, and showed me my way;” and I drew my little stool to her feet, and gave her an account of my journey, and the invitation tendered.

“And may I go, Aunt Martha?” I asked eagerly.

Aunt Martha raised her hand once more to her head. “I don’t know, dear; I’m afraid you would be a good deal of trouble to him sometimes.”

“Why, auntie? because I am such a very great trouble to you?”

“Oh, no, dear! but gentlemen are differently constituted; little things annoy them. But you may go and try it if you

wish ; I am afraid you will be lonely now that Richard is gone. You had better take your berries to Huldah, and let her look them over for tea, and then make yourself ready for dinner ; you are very warm, and the cap may rest awhile.”

“What have you been doing all the morning, auntie ?”

“Oh ! thinking ; my head was too bad to let me work.”

“What were you thinking of, Aunt Martha ?” and I rose and smoothed her silvery hair caressingly, as I asked the question.

“Not very pleasant thoughts, Bertha ; something you read Saturday evening made me feel gloomy, and keeps running through my brain. Are you not sorry to have made me unhappy, Bertha ?”

I struggled with my false shame, and answered, “Not if you gain true happiness by it, Aunt Martha ; for ‘This life is but the falling of a leaf, a dropping tear ;’ and it is

not so much matter, after all, whether we are happy or unhappy here, for an endless life of suffering or joy is to come after this ;” and I kissed her forehead.

“ It’s all true, Bertie,” she said, “ but I don’t like to think of it ;” and she turned her head away. But whether she *liked* to think of it or not, I knew she did think of it, that she could not help it. After a parting caress to her silver hair, I carried my berries to Huldah.

“ Didn’t get lost, did you ?” she asked, guessing rightly that I had.

“ Yes, I did, Huldah,” I confessed.

“ Some folks are mighty wise ; wiser’n them that know better’n they do. Somebody knew her way all round the place this mornin’.”

“ I was wrong, Huldah, I know ; but I’ve brought you some berries,” I said.

The berries seemed to mollify her greatly ; and, leaving them, I retraced my steps

to my room, indulging in happy anticipations of the visit to Ansdale Hall, and already concocting in my brain a letter to send Richard by the next mail.



## CHAPTER III.

### *ANSDALE HALL.*

**N**EXT morning the practicing was promptly concluded, immediately after breakfast; and as the cap had been finished the evening before, and honored our guests by its presence at the tea-table, there were no further duties to bind me at home; so, leaving Aunt Martha reading in her arm-chair, at half-past nine I was on my way to the Hall.

I was ushered on my arrival into the great library, in the western wing, with the ivy twining around and overhanging the windows. Richie and I had often looked at it from the outside, and thought what a gloomy room it must be; but it was not,

after all. Everything in the room—the paper, carpet, chairs, and sofa—was green, even to the bouquet on the table, which displayed no flower but a lovely white-rosebud. Of course, the prevailing color was the very thing for a library, and, as the sunbeams glancing in through the green curtains lighted up the room so merrily, it seemed charming to me. I was wondering at, and admiring, at a distance, the great array of books, when my host made his appearance.

“Ah! good-morning, Bertie,” he said pleasantly; “I am very happy to see you;” and seating himself by me on the sofa, he talked for some time on indifferent topics.

“Now are you ready for work?” he asked at last. “What shall we take first?”

I glanced around the room rather curiously. “I don’t care, in the least, sir,” I answered frankly.

“ Well, then, shall we begin with this ? ” and he pointed to a large Bible on the table.

I assented ; and, seating himself in the great chair, he read the twenty-sixth chapter of Matthew, and then, closing the Bible, began to talk to me about it, of the sufferings of the long-sought Messiah, and the denial of his self-confident follower.

“ Let us take warning from Peter, my little friend,” he said, “ and strive not to deny our Master in thought, word, or deed.”

“ Why do you say *us*, Mr. Ansdale ? ” I asked quickly ; “ do *you* ever deny him ? ”

“ Don’t we all deny him, Bertie, whenever we act contrary to his commands ? is it not equal to saying that he is no Master of ours ? Ah, little Bertie ! we don’t mean it so ; but the world is large, and its children watch jealously to see how the chil-



dren of the Master uphold his name, and to laugh at their little failures."

"That is strange," I said; "I never knew people did that."

He smiled again,—a rather strange smile. "Now for the history; what is your choice, little Bertie?"

"I don't know, sir. I shall be satisfied, whatever we read."

So he chose for me the first volume of Macaulay's *England*; and I had not been so intensely absorbed in anything that summer as I was in our morning's occupation. It was not altogether the book, for he talked quite as much as we read, and his conversation charmed me more than the reading. He wandered into many different paths of knowledge, drawn on by the subject before us: for he had traveled a great deal, evidently, and not only remembered everything he had seen, but was able to picture all to others as well. It was

half-past twelve when we closed the book for the day, and I rose on the instant to prepare to depart.

“No, no; I can’t let you leave now,” he said. “Auntie would never expect you in this hot sun;” and he took my hat from my hand.

“But what am I to do, sir?” I asked, sorely puzzled. “You wish me to come here and read every morning, and I can’t possibly spare more than two or three hours a day.”

“What! so much care on your shoulders, and so early in life?” he asked smilingly.

“Oh! no, sir, not that exactly; but I don’t like to leave Aunt Martha alone so long.”

“Yes, you are right,” he said; “still, I can’t let you leave in this midday sun, when I have you safe under shelter. Can’t you come to me in future at the close of

the afternoon? I will send a messenger to your aunt presently to account for your detention, if it will make you more comfortable. You must lunch with me."

I thanked him, and assented. He left me for a moment to summon a servant, and then returned.

"Now I must find something to amuse you," he said, "for I have letters to write. Do you ever draw?"

"Oh! yes, sir; I am very fond of it."

"Indeed! what have you been doing lately?"

"A picture of our old home, for my brother."

He looked at me curiously for a moment.

"You must show it to me, then," he said; "bring it with you some day."

"Richie has it with him," I answered; "I should be pleased to show you the original."

"I should like to have you, my child,"

he said ; “ I see that the home, whatever it was like, has left pleasant memories behind it.”

“ How could you tell that, Mr. Ansdale ? ” I asked ; for I thought I had spoken of it very soberly indeed.

“ There was a reflection of some old-time sunshine in your eyes when you mentioned it,” he answered, smiling.

And then he drew forth an engraving from a large portfolio on the table and placed it before me to copy. It was a quaint little picture of some children crossing a brook ; and I thought he must have had some memories connected with it, from the expression of his face as he looked at it.

“ It is just such a brook as I used to cross with my sister, right back of the old homestead, long years ago,” he said with a smile ; and then I set to work most zealously, and neither of us spoke for some

time, for I became completely absorbed in my task and was intent on finishing it, and he had several letters to write.

At length, just as the bell was ringing for luncheon, Mr. Ansdale sealed his last letter and closed the heavy rosewood desk. I gave a quick glance toward him, and, seeing the row of letters on the table, recalled my eyes to my picture once more, fearful that I might not be allowed to finish it.

“You look warm and tired, Bertie,” said Mr. Ansdale, coming toward me ; “let the drawing rest for to-day, and you shall finish it to-morrow. I want you to take luncheon with me now.”

Of course, as I had no right to disobey, I released the picture, very reluctantly, and rose to follow him. He quietly returned the picture to his great portfolio, and then led me into the dining-room, or rather the little room where he ate when

he was alone ; and there we had a cozy, home-like meal together, sitting at opposite sides of the small round table.

When we returned to the library, Mr. Ansdale took up a little book that I had noticed on the table when I first entered the room, for it was a counterpart of my own condemned hymn-book.

“ Bertie, have you ever seen this ? ” he asked, turning the leaves over slowly as he spoke.

“ Oh ! yes, Mr. Ansdale,” I answered quickly ; “ I have one like it at home, and read it very often.”

He smiled pleasantly, and kept turning over the leaves, until he had found what he was searching for.

“ Then, Bertie,” he said, “ you have doubtless read long before this the little hymn that I was about to call your attention to ; I noticed it for the first time this morning, and it impressed me : this,” —

and he read my own little favorite, that had troubled Aunt Martha on Saturday evening.

Of course I had read it before, but it had never seemed so beautiful to me as when I heard it read by Mr. Ansdale.

“I think, Bertie,” he said, as he closed the book, “that this hymn would do almost any one good who should practice it feeling constantly that there is only one life, and no ‘time to sport away.’ Bertie, could we not, ought we not to do more than we are doing for the blessed Saviour, who has done everything for us? How is it with you?”

“I know I do not nearly so much as I should, sir,” I answered, as I thought of the four over whom my influence extended more immediately, — auntie and Huldah, Richard and Nelly Rayden, — besides all the other unemployed means and opportunities of doing good which my heavenly

Father had granted me; "but it is sometimes very hard to do right, and very unpleasant," I concluded.

"Is it right for us to think of that, Bertie? 'Even Jesus Christ pleased not himself.' Why should we seek only our own pleasure?"

"We shouldn't, sir," I answered.

"We shall be accountable before God for all our misused opportunities, Bertie," he said gravely; "do not neglect yours: let us make a new resolution to do all we can for Christ. Bertie, dear, believe me, we shall thus be far happier."

And I did believe him.

On my way home that afternoon I formed many plans for the future; among others, that of employing my evenings in reading to our good old Huldah. She was very ignorant, I knew, about heavenly things, and no one had "cared for her soul." Yes! One had cared for it, — he



who, having once known and loved all the wondrous glory of heaven, left it to be crucified on Golgotha ; he had cared for it, and counted it among his jewels ; he who knew all things saw and ordained from eternity what she should be.

Nelly Rayden met me on the piazza with extended arms.

“I was on the point of leaving,” she said, “for I have waited an hour for you, with my heart ever so full of jealousy. To think that you should be admitted to the very heart of that mysterious mansion, when I have not yet crossed the threshold ! Come in and tell me all about it.”

I obeyed very willingly, and entered the deserted sitting-room ; then she monopolized Aunt Martha’s easy-chair, and bade me take the stool at her feet and give her an account of my afternoon adventures : which I proceeded to do.

“Why didn’t you tell him that I was

your dearest friend, and wanted to study Macaulay too?" she asked roguishly.

"You should have gone blackberrying, Nelly."

"Indeed I should!"

"And he is so good, Nelly,—so good a Christian, I mean." Nelly looked grave, and played with her parasol; after a long pause she said, "Do you know what I came here for this afternoon, Bertie?"

"I suppose to talk about Mr. Ansdale," I said mischievously.

"Not quite. Father and mother are going to Niagara on Monday, and I want you to come and stay with Laura and me while they are away."

"And leave Aunt Martha!" I said in surprise.

"You can come every day and attend to her comfort; and, besides, Mr. Winsley has gone to New York on business, and his wife wouldn't need a second invitation

to let Aunt Martha's company solace her for his absence. She will come if you ask her."

"I don't think it will do; but you must ask Aunt Martha," I said reluctantly, for I wanted to go very much.

"Have I not been talking to her all the morning?" she said; "I only want your sanction; I have talked so strongly to her, and have presented so many arguments, that she has sought the protection of her own room."

"What did she say?"

"'Yes,' of course."

"Truly?"

"Truly."

"And will she ask Mrs. Winsley?"

"She says I may," laughed Nelly.

"Then I'll go."

"Oh! you're a darling; you're a treasure!" she cried. "Remember next Monday; and now good-bye;" and she caught

me in her arms and covered my face with kisses.

I watched her as she tripped down the path, so graceful, so light-hearted ; and my conscience smote me, oh ! so heavily, for I knew full well that I had never tried to win her to my Saviour ; and so another resolve was formed.

“ Aunt Martha,” I said, as I heard her step in the doorway, “ do you like this plan of Nelly’s ? You were very kind to consent, but do you like it ? ”

“ I never love to have you away, dear,” she answered gently ; “ but I shall get on very nicely with Mrs. Winsley ; and it will do you good.”

“ Thank you, auntie.”

“ It has been so quiet all the morning, and I can’t get that verse out of my head, Bertie. I will sit down here on the step, and you shall get your hymn-book and read it all through to me, while I am knitting.”

I was very, very glad to obey. Leaving Aunt Martha sitting on the doorstep, I ran quickly up to my room in search of the book, and then sat by her side and read it slowly to the end,—that beautiful hymn of Bonar.

“It is very solemn to think that life is so short.”

“But, oh ! auntie, it is joy, happiness, to feel that life is not in our own hands ; that, of whatever length it may be, it is entirely yielded up to Him who has died for us ; that all, everything, is his, and that death will be heaven.”

“I would give all there is left of my life to feel so,” she murmured, bowing her silvery head.

“You needn’t do that, auntie ; Jesus gave his life that you might feel so ; it was worth more than any human life.”

There were two or three tears glittering among the meshes of the knitting-work as

she raised her bowed head and laid her hand in mine.

“You’re a good little girl, Bertie ; I am going to think about it.”

“I’d rather you wouldn’t think so much about it until you’ve *done* it ; if you want the happiness, that’s the first step, Aunt Martha.”

“Thank you, dear ; you may leave the little book with me. I hope you will have a very pleasant visit, and not desert me entirely.”

“Be sure I shall not, auntie,” I said earnestly, rising, and kissing her warmly. “I won’t leave you at all if you say so.”

“I want you to go, love,” she answered ; “I would not have you stay, and they will probably keep you only about a week.”

So the question of the visit was decided, and the next morning Nelly took a long hour’s walk to Mrs. Winsley’s to deliver

her self-imposed message, and received a very favorable reply.

It was not until Wednesday evening that I carried out my resolution in regard to Huldah. After our early supper our good pastor came in, and, well knowing that he would approve of my object, I left Aunt Martha and him in the sitting-room together, and penetrated to the kitchen. Huldah was engaged in washing dishes, and I approached her very timidly.

“What be you here for, Bertha?” she said, with a hasty glance at the figure darkening her door.

“I thought perhaps you would like to have me read to you, Huldah,” I returned.

“Well, I wonder what queer crotchet you will git into your head, next news. Are girls allers so full er whims? There! don’t get put out; I shan’t say nuthin agin it if you read me a bit arter I git cleaned up, but I don’t want nobody about now.”

Thus rebuffed, I tried to keep back a smile at my defeat, and returned to the sitting-room; but in the course of half an hour I retraced my steps, in hopes of a better reception.

“ Well, you ben’t put out, be you ? ” said Huldah, who, with dishes washed and kitchen arranged, was seated with her sewing by the window. “ I git cross when I have my chores hangin’ round so long; now you can go at it.”

“ Do you ever read the Bible, Huldah ? ” I asked.

“ Law sakes, no, child ! I go to church off and on, and I’ve got a Bible tucked away with my traps up garret ; that’s enough, a n’t it ? ”

“ What good does it do you up garret if you never look at it ? ” I asked. “ I’m going to read from the Bible to you to-night.”

“ Go ahead,” she said sententiously, pulling fiercely at her thread.



I opened the book at the eleventh chapter of John, and read it, without any comments, to a very interested listener.

“How do you like it, Huldah?”

“It’s kinder queer,” she asserted; “of course them things ben’t all true, though.”

“Why, of course it is true; every word of it is true,” I answered.

“And that man act’ally walked out of his grave?”

“Of course he did; for Jesus was God, you know; and since he made us all in the beginning, he could certainly bring any one back to life.”

“It must have seemed funny,” she said, musingly. “I don’t mind if you come in to-morrow night, if you’ve got nuthin else to do. Only wait till the dishes is washed, and you won’t git no cross words.”

And I acted on her advice in future, and had no “cross words”

## CHAPTER IV.

### *THE BLUE MERINO.*

**T**HE week passed very pleasantly and quickly away; but every day was a counterpart of the one preceding it.

In the morning I dusted rooms, made beds, practiced, and sewed with Aunt Martha; at four o'clock I repaired to the Hall, and after our early supper read to Huldah, who seemed to become more and more interested. Each afternoon Nelly gave us the pleasure of her company for five minutes, if no more, to inform me that it was one day nearer Monday; and to inquire about the Hall, its master, and Macaulay; though I think she was but little interested in the latter, except as it related to the others.

The hours at the Hall were very pleasant to me ; and I liked them better coming in the afternoon, as it is always pleasanter to take recreation *after* work, and the visit was a delightful rest ; and besides, there were other reasons that rendered the afternoon far preferable to the morning. The drawing that I had commenced was finished, and presented with my most grateful acknowledgments to Mr. Ansdale ; but for some reason I had always forgotten to carry the other one to him.

It was Saturday afternoon. The week had passed at last, with all its duties and pleasures ; and another Sabbath was at hand : it seemed much more than a week since Richard had left us, but it was not quite so long, as yet.

Supper was ended ; Aunt Martha sat on the piazza reading, and I had just taken my Bible to repair to the kitchen, surmis-

ing that the dishes were washed and dried, when Nelly came dancing up the path.

“Saturday night, so near to Monday!” she said, kissing me joyously. So near! so it had seemed last Saturday night to Richard, with a difference. “Does this little lady always bear a Bible with her, Aunt Martha?”

“She’s a good little girl,” said Aunt Martha, sighing; “she uses her Bible for others as well as herself.”

“Don’t just now, Bertie; don’t be a missionary to-night; I want to talk to you.”

“I was only going to read to Huldah, as I do every night.”

“Do you? good! I always like to pay a visit to Huldah,—come, come, Aunt Martha!” but Aunt Martha preferred sitting on the piazza, and watching us, to going; so Nelly consented to leave her.

Dear little Nelly! she made herself at

home everywhere,— in the kitchen as well as the parlor.

Wishing a merry good-evening to Huldah, she seated herself on the window-sill, throwing her hat on the floor, to let the evening breeze play in her soft waving hair.

“ I like to come here, Huldah,” she said ; “ you’re about the neatest bee I’ve ever seen. I tremble every time I set foot in your hive, and look for the dusty foot-prints ;” and she glanced patronizingly around the bright, clean kitchen.

Huldah’s vanity was flattered, and her wry face softened into something like a smile, as Nelly made this little speech.

“ It ben’t over and above clean, arter all,” she said ; “ nothin’ like what ’tis some days.”

“ I’m afraid it would dazzle my eyes then,” said Nelly. “ But now, Huldah, you and I are both very bad, and this good little girl is going to read to us ;” and she

smoothed out her dress complacently, and settled back in her narrow seat, all attention.

“I don’t know as I be so powerful bad,” said Huldah crossly. “I’ve knowed folks a sight wus.”

“Oh! you’re no worse than I,” laughed Nelly, “but she thinks us both bad enough,—eh, Bertie? Never mind; I don’t deny your goodness, dear.”

“But I am not good,” I asserted; “no better than you or Huldah. I don’t trust in my own goodness at all. But the Bible says those who love Christ and belong to him shall be clothed in his righteousness. That is the difference, Nelly dear; I am his, and have his goodness in place of my own. I want you and Huldah to be his too.”

Nelly sighed heavily, and caught at a branch of honeysuckle by the window.

“Forgive me, love, I didn’t mean to pain

you. Now we will hear you read, as long as you like, and be as quiet as we can; come, Bertie."

And when I had finished the evening's portion — for I was going through the Gospels with Huldah — she took the book quietly from me and read another chapter herself.

"Now let's talk about it, Bertie," she said; "I like to hear you talk."

"I don't see into that," said Huldah. "I never knowed 'twas wicked to let folks look when you guv things away."

"Ah!" said Nelly, "I don't obey that rule at all. I can't even give a penny to a little ragged child but I am looking around to see how many notice me. *My* left hand always knows what my right hand does."

I explained to Huldah, — "I think it means that we should not give things away, or do good, *because* we want people to see us, but to please Christ."

“I’d like to do somethin’ to please him,” she said musingly; “well, we’ll see.”

So Nelly and I left her in a dreamy state over her sewing, and sauntered out through the front porch for a twilight stroll. Arm in arm we walked up the gravel-path, and the grassy road beyond the gate, until we reached the Hall,—the usual terminus to our evening walk.

“Bertie,” she said, as we turned to retrace our steps, “do you know I do want to do right? I’ve been thinking of it for ever so long; and I laugh at you only because I love you. I’d like to change places with you; will you? would you if you could? Would you be Nellie Rayden, and let me personate Bertie Norton? I would love Nellie Rayden so very, very dearly then, and Bertha too: say, Bertie.”

“I wouldn’t be any one but myself,” I answered.



“ Well, I’m going to do right, Bertha ; I think of it every day, and when I think of it I always want to come straight to you in hopes you will say something to me : sometimes you do, and sometimes you don’t, but when you do I’m so naughty as to laugh at you. Haven’t I made a clean breast ? ”

We sat down in the little arbor together and talked for a long half hour. It was not hard to talk to her then, because of her own confession ; she seemed to like it too, — the conversation, the moonlight, and everything else about us ; until finally she started up, declaring it was too late to go home ; that she had known it would be before she had finished talking, — had told them so at home, — and was going to spend the night with me. I was greatly rejoiced to keep her ; hardly anything pleased me so much as to have Nellie share my room, were it only for one night ; and now she

asserted her intention of remaining over the Sabbath as well.

“I was tired of waiting for Monday to come, and I resolved to make Saturday meet it by commencing the visit myself. It’s all the same to me where we are, so we are together, and I knew you wanted me.”

That evening, after Nelly was in bed, I stood for two or three minutes at my window, enjoying the moonlight; suddenly I heard the kitchen door softly open, and a dark muffled figure stepped out from the shadow. I knew in a moment it was Huldah, though her hood was closely drawn over her face, and her shawl laid aside for a heavy cloak. But what could Huldah want at that time, running away from her bed, with that great bundle under her arm? My first impulse was to speak to her, but I forbore, and after watching her a moment in her walk toward the village, I turned and told Nelly what I had seen.

“Going off to seek her fortune doubtless,” yawned Nelly, turning over and closing her eyes; but I had my own conjectures: Nelly might say what she chose, I knew Huldah better than she did; so I stood by the window until I saw the same muffled figure returning through the moonlight, without the bundle; then I joined Nelly and said no more about it.

The next morning Nelly woke me very early.

“Bertie,” she said, “I am so troubled: I have been awake for a long time, thinking, and suffering from the strokes of conscience. You know Mrs. McKay, don’t you?” she questioned, as I raised myself in bed to listen. “You have heard of her? she lives in that little hovel near the Hall, and she’s desperately poor. Don’t you remember our remarking so often how very neat she keeps the premises? Father assisted her a good deal last winter, but not

lately. She has been ill and not able to work at all, and Saturday morning, while mother was away at the village, her little Katy came to the house, and I was the only one disengaged, so I saw her; she said her mother had sold her last remaining dress the night before to get them food, and unless its loss was supplied in some way she would be obliged to stay from her work all day, and they had not enough bread for another meal. I promised faithfully to deliver her message when mother returned, but forgot it entirely."

"What shall you do?"

"I'm fearfully perplexed to know."

"Go around there after breakfast."

"I believe I'll go if you'll go with me."

I assented, and thus pacified she turned over and resumed her broken slumbers.

I thought Huldah looked unusually bright that morning as she went about her duties; and something more strange than all else

struck my vision. Her favorite dress of blue merino, which had been displayed every Sabbath, both summer and winter, for years, was missing, and its place supplied by a brown calico, not half so pretty in my eyes, and, I was sure, not in hers.

“Where’s your merino, Huldah?” I questioned.

“That ’ere mereny’s done pretty good service; it’s about time for it to be laid on the shelf,” she muttered.

“Is it getting too warm?” I asked,—an inquiry I had often made before, and always received a negative answer.

“I don’t know but it be,” she said shortly.

So I ceased my comments, and prepared to accompany Nelly, who was already dressed for her tardy errand of mercy, and impatient to start. She intended to stop at Mrs. McKay’s first, learn all the particulars, and their most immediate wants, and

then return home for the means to relieve them.

So we started on our walk, precisely the same as that of the night before, — up by the way of the Hall. Mr. Ansdale was standing by the gate as we passed, talking to a ragged little urchin, who, with his hands in his pockets, stood looking up at his questioner in grave astonishment. I do not know what he was saying to the child, but he gave me a pleasant “Good-morning, Bertie,” as we passed, and Nelly a graceful bow.

“See!” cried my little fairy, glancing back over her shoulder; “he is taking that little good-for-naught into the Hall. I wish I were in his place, — the little boy’s, I mean.”

“Oh, Nelly! what an idea!”

“I don’t believe things are so bad, after all,” she said, as we neared the little cottage; “there is Madame McKay herself in

a substantial blue merino, washing up the breakfast-dishes; I can see her through the window."

"Huldah's blue merino!" I cried as Nelly opened the door.

"Mrs. McKay," said Nelly frankly, "I'm so sorry; Katy came yesterday and told me what trouble you were in, but I entirely forgot to mention it to mamma."

"Yes, miss; it's niver matter, miss," she said, making a profound courtesy; "ye's very kind, but there's folks kinder. While the children and me was cryin' together in the night, a big pack o' cloes and money rolled inter the wiuder, and drapped onto the carpet."

At which words I glanced down, wondering if the "carpet" served its purpose only in the night-time, and where she had tucked it at present; but was obliged to conclude that it existed only in her imagination.

"Shure, miss, I jumped from me sate, an

I looked beyant the road wid me two eyes, an I see summat black movin' down by the Hall, an for the life o' me I never knowed since who me an the childen is to be blessin' for the garminits."

"I wouldn't bless any one, then," I said ; "leave that to God."

"Shure I'm thinkin' you're in the right, miss," she replied, glancing at me for the first time. "'Twas a kind dade, and a merciful."

"I'm very glad you obtained help, Mrs. McKay," said Nelly brightly ; "and if there is anything else you have need of, you must not fail to ask me for it. I'll not forget again."

"I believe ye, miss ; young folks will be young folks, and it's mesel wud wish it. Good-day, miss."

"Nelly !" I cried as we reached the road once more, "do you know that is Huldah's precious blue merino ?"



“So it is! I hadn’t thought of it. Isn’t she good?” said Nelly lightly; “it was a grand idea.”

In our reading that evening, after the chapter was finished, Huldah asked me a question.

“Bertha,” she said, “I s’pose if folks gives a good heap o’ things away, without anybody’s knowin’ on’t, they’s putty sure of goin’ to heaven, ben’t they?”

“Why no, Huldah,” I answered earnestly; “we can none of us go to heaven for anything we have done; we must not trust to that at all. Even the best people can not do that.”

“Then how will we ever git to it?” she asked.

“Because Jesus died for us, and we have given ourselves to him.”

Huldah sighed and looked down at the brown calico. “Then there ain’t nary bit

of use in bein' good an givin' up things," she said.

"Those who love Jesus more than anything else in the world, Huldah, should be willing to give up anything for him, just to please him. They will have more happiness in return than they ever had without him; and Christ says, 'If ye love me, keep my commandments.' Will you give up your own works and come to him, Huldah?"

But Huldah sighed and turned away.



## CHAPTER V.

### *MY VISIT.*

**M**ONDAY morning, at ten o'clock precisely, Mrs. Winsley arrived. By that time I felt decidedly weary, as I had been all the morning attending to so many self-imposed duties, as Nelly called them. But Aunt Martha had one of her headaches; and Huldah — brooding over the loss of her blue merino, which had gone “all for no account” as she said — was decidedly cross, and would render me no assistance in putting the rooms in order. There was an additional amount of that work to do; for the spare room, which was only used on special occasions, and kept closely shut up the rest of the time,

had to be aired, swept, and dusted, for the accommodation of Aunt Martha's visitor. Then there were fresh cake and pies to make and bake, for Aunt Martha did not wish them done on Saturday, so long before Mrs. Winsley's arrival; and it was "wash day," and Huldah totally unavailable. Nelly, pitying my misery, as she chose to call it, lent her dainty fingers for my assistance; but they were so little used to work that they were not of much service, and I could only laugh at her.

At ten o'clock Mrs. Winsley's carriage drove up, surprising me in my large calico apron, profusely sprinkled with flour, with half-completed huckleberry pies before me; while Nelly, in a somewhat similar costume, was vainly endeavoring to roll out some ginger-snaps, that would stick to the pin.

"Flour, Nelly!" I whispered in great friendliness, for I saw Huldah looking quiz-

zically at her. "Don't be afraid of the flour."

"I don't think I need," she said, glancing dubiously at her powdered apron. "Oh! there's the carriage with Mrs. Winsley, I declare! Some people,—ah! excuse me, Miss Bertha, I'm speaking of a mutual friend, you know,—some people don't pretend to keep fashionable hours."

"Please go to the door, Huldah," I ventured.

"I shan't do no sech thing," she asserted. "Shan't leave my clothes for nobody."

"I will go!" I cried. "It is only Mrs. Winsley, and she has seen me this way a great many times before, so I don't care for her;" and I rushed, apron and all, through the passage-way.

Mrs. Winsley was there truly, and greeted me very kindly; but when Aunt Martha came—headache notwithstanding—to meet her, and I was about to close

the door, I saw another figure ascending the steps. Mr. Ansdale! was it possible? and I in my great powdered apron!

“Ah! Bertie,” he said, very pleasantly, “I am glad to see you are not afraid of making yourself useful. I’ll not detain you; but, knowing that I should not see you else to-day, I have come to enlist you in a good cause.”

“Won’t you please come in, Mr. Ansdale?”

“No, no, Bertie, I don’t want to keep you from your duty; sit down here a moment and I will tell you what I wish.” So, powdered apron and all, I seated myself by his side.

“Did you notice my little friend of yesterday morning?” he asked; “wasn’t he a bright little fellow?”

“I should think so, sir; I didn’t notice him particularly.”

“Then I shall have to answer for him;

he is very intelligent, but very ignorant. How long are you going to remain from home?"

"About a week, sir."

"Have you a mind to do a good deed on your return, Bertie? 'Day after day filled up with blessed toil,' you know. Will you let him come here for an hour every day, if Aunt Martha is willing, and teach him yourself? If so, I will fill your place until you return; but you will do better than I. His mother is very poor, but honest, and what she has taught him has been good; but it is little; she is very ignorant herself. It is a good work, Bertie, and he is anxious to learn. Will you do it?"

"Oh! yes, sir, I am sure Aunt Martha can't object; I shall be very glad."

"Thank you, dear," he said; "I wanted to know, as I have some plans to arrange.

Good-morning. You will come to me to-morrow ? ”

“ Yes, Mr. Ansdale.”

“ And bring your friend Miss Rayden, if she likes.”

“ I am sure she would be pleased to go, sir.”

“ Then good-bye, Bertie.” He shook hands with me, and I turned toward the kitchen. Nelly met me half-way.

“ What have you been doing ? ” she cried, in a fever of curiosity.

“ Talking with Mr. Ansdale.”

Nelly looked inquiringly at my apron.

“ Yes, I kept it on, Nelly. He wants me to bring you to the Hall.”

Nelly clapped her hands.

“ Did you tell him I would be charmed, enraptured, delighted ? ”

“ Simply *pleased*, Nelly.”

“ I will tell him the rest : now come



and finish your pies ; we must be off before the sun is too hot."

Nevertheless, it was decidedly warm before all the farewells were said, and we on our way. Nelly could think of nothing but the Hall, and would talk of nothing else ; it was very hard for her to wait until the next afternoon for her expectations to be gratified. She was very impatient, and persuaded me to go half an hour before my usual time. She amused me greatly when she was actually there ; for she was scarcely still a moment, but, after trying a few pages of Macaulay, she left us, and flitted noiselessly around the library, hither and thither, — tried all the window-seats, examined all the paintings, and read the titles on the books. When we had finished, Mr. Ansdale said to her, —

" I am afraid you have not enjoyed yourself, Miss Nelly, and will be reluctant to try Ansdale Hall again."

“Oh! no, Mr. Ansdale,” she cried; “please invite me again; I am not like that studious little mouse: I prefer motion to Macaulay, and paintings to learned discussions. The very consciousness of being in Ansdale Hall is itself a happiness.”

So she had a smiling invitation to repeat her visit; and after that Nelly accompanied me every day. In the course of a day or two she became so much at home that she begged permission to leave the library during “that tedious Macaulay-lesson,” and wander around the other parts of the house, making acquaintance with all points of interest; and so she became quite familiar with all the ins and outs of the old Hall, while my knowledge was principally confined to the library.

“Bertie,” she said to me, as we were returning on Saturday afternoon, “it’s altogether the dearest old house that I have

ever seen ; if I could only live there I shouldn't have another thing to ask for."

"I should have another thing to ask for you still," I said.

"Bertie," she continued, "you should see the parlors ; they are charming ! Of course I have not ventured into any of the private rooms. Do you know Mr. Ans-  
dale is quite an artist ? A splendid one, I should call him. There is a portrait of his wife ; she must have been lovely, Bertie. He painted it from memory after her death ; Rachel, the housekeeper, told me so."

"I should love to see it, Nelly," I answered ; "but I haven't so much spare time at the Hall as you."

So Nelly laughed, and said no more about the portrait, or her discoveries at the Hall, that evening.

The next day was the Sabbath, and excessively warm ; so, after morning service,

as Laura's room was decidedly the coolest in the house, she invited Nelly and me to bring our books and sit with her. We found her reclining on the sofa, in a loose wrapper, with a book carefully laid by her side.

"What are you reading, Bertha?" she asked, as I seated myself in her easy rocking-chair.

"Hymns, Laura."

"Oh! are you not fond of light reading?"

"She doesn't like anything but Macaulay and hymns," said Nelly slyly.

"Ah! indeed! do you read Macaulay, Bertha?"

"That is her reading with Mr. Ansdale," said Nelly, answering for me.

"An excellent plan; he has very good judgment, I should say. But, Bertha, my love, I want you to do a deed of kindness. Nelly tells me you are such a fine reader, and I am going to ask if you would be will-

ing to read to me ; I would not trouble you, but my eyes have pained me so to-day that I can scarcely see ; I am paying the penalty for reading so much lately. Here is one of Dickens's latest works, which I have never read, and am impatient to commence ; I don't doubt you would find this interesting."

"What! read Dickens on Sunday!" I thought; "is that what she means? Even Aunt Martha would never do anything so openly wrong as that."

"Don't you like him?" she questioned blandly; "I thought all young people did."

"I have never read a page of his works," I answered shortly.

"Then here is a fine opportunity for you to begin," she laughed; "you see I am very selfish this afternoon, but the heat must furnish my excuse. Don't be timid, dear, we will be partial critics;" and she smiled languidly and handed me the vol-

ume. I took it and turned over the leaves abstractedly, without thinking what I was doing.

“I wouldn’t read, Bertie, if I didn’t want to,” said Nelly, who was wandering around from one window to another in search of a breath of air. “I should think you might see, Laura, that she doesn’t feel like it, this warm weather; your eyes have always served your purpose before.”

“No, she is obliging, and she knows I want her to,” said Laura coaxingly.

There was a great struggle going on in my heart; I had not strength in myself to refuse, and I did not pray for more.

“Come, dear, I have not read any, so you may begin with the first chapter, and we will have a delightful afternoon, notwithstanding the heat.”

There was a long silence; my heart beat violently, and my cheeks flushed and burned.

“Are you not well?” said Laura listlessly; and then I raised the book and read, in choking, trembling tones, the first page; while Richard’s voice seemed to say to me continually, — “Stand by your colors!” After the first page my voice grew clearer, and I read several chapters to attentive listeners. At length Laura fell asleep, and Nelly took the book from me and led me back to our own room; then, throwing herself on her own little bed, she said, “Now I am going to continue the story; I don’t believe you care to read, so you may go back to the hymns and the sofa.”

One week ago I would have entreated Nelly not to read that book on the Sabbath; now what right had I to say anything about it?

I sighed heavily, and took up my little hymn-book, but the hymns seemed to pain

me now, so I closed my eyes, and after a long time fell asleep.

When I opened them Nelly was missing, and I heard voices in the entry; it was Laura's that I first distinguished: —

“I was confident that she would do it, but you insisted so provokingly that you knew she would not that I was determined to prove her. You see I was right.”

“I think you carried it entirely too far,” said Nelly, — “beyond the bounds of politeness; you could have readily seen that she was very unwilling, but you would persist. I am very sorry; — sorry for myself, for I can't trust her as I did before. It was unkind in you.”

“I don't care; I like consistency, — the appearance of it, at least,” said Laura.

I slipped from the sofa, and made my way from a side door down the back staircase, and out into the garden. I felt very, very unhappy. I had been ashamed of my



Saviour, deserted my colors, lost my influence with Nelly. I went out into the little summer-house, and wept, and prayed for forgiveness; prayed to be restored to favor. Then as I rose from my knees a sudden thought came to me: I would go to the Hall, tell Mr. Ansdale all, and ask his advice. As I went in for my hat, Nelly met me.

"Where are you going, Bertie?" she said lightly. "I have been looking all about for you."

I turned my head away, and answered briefly, "I am going to the Hall for a little while."

"What! not to give an account of yourself?" she asked. "Mr. Ansdale may not approve."

I burst into tears, and, catching up my hat, turned from her, and flew down-stairs and into the garden, where I stopped for a moment to dry my tears, before seeking

Mr. Ansdale. As I drew near the Hall, I saw him standing in the gate-way dismissing his little protégé, and for a moment my heart failed me ; but he held out his hand so cordially that I would not have retreated if I could have done so. Therefore, at his wish, when I had confessed that I had something to tell him, I followed him into the library, and related my story.

“I am sorry for you, Bertie dear,” he said ; “you have not only done very wrong, and denied your Master, but you have willfully thrown away the influence for good, or a portion of it, that God had given you.”

“Oh, Mr. Ansdale ! can’t you say something to comfort me ? ” I asked. “I think God has forgiven me.”

“I don’t doubt it, Bertie,” he answered. “He is ever ready to receive the wanderer who will return to his arms. Try to please him in future, Bertie. God is always giving us means to glorify him ; let us im-

prove them ;” and he put his arms around me, wiped away my tears, and kissed my forehead.

“ Now go home,” he said, “ and tell Miss Rayden and Nelly how sorry you are ; come for your lesson to-morrow afternoon ; and on Tuesday I shall send you your scholar, if we live until then.” So I promised to do as he wished.

I walked home quietly, and met them both as though nothing unusual had occurred, but after Nelly had made all her inquiries, I told them that I was very, *very* sorry for what I had done, and that I hoped not to do so again.

Laura laughed, but Nelly kissed me. “ We won’t think anything of it, dear,” she said ; “ every one does wrong sometimes.”

“ Ah ! but every one shouldn’t, Nelly,” I said, and Nelly turned away.

## CHAPTER VI.

*JACK.*

**H**ULDAH, will you please set Aunt Martha's room to rights this morning? she has a headache, and I have the parlors to arrange, books to find, and so much to do before nine o'clock!" It was early Tuesday morning, and Huldah, broom in hand, was sweeping the front piazza.

"What on arth's goin' to happen at nine o'clock?" she asked, stopping midway, and gazing at me.

"Why, Mr. Ansdale is going to bring a little boy here to me," I answered, "and I want to be ready for him."

"And what be you goin' to do to him?"

she asked, aghast; "I an't goin' to have no boys around my house; so there's an end on't. You kin forgit that, sooner'n you thought on't."

"But I want to teach him, Huldah; he's a poor ignorant little boy."

"I think some folks better larn more themselves, 'fore they goes to larnin' other folks."

"Well, Huldah, I can teach him the little I know, can't I? Aunt Martha is willing; I suppose it will be annoying to you; but God is pleased to have us give up our own wills to others, Huldah."

"You kin take that ere to hum," said Huldah; "why an't you so mighty spry to give up your'n?"

"I am not the only one concerned, you know," I answered.

"I kinder guess you an't," said Huldah dryly, drawing down the corners of her mouth; "well, I s'pose you kin have your

way, if you're sot on it. But lock a here, Bertha," and Huldah paused and looked at me over her broom-handle, "I don't see no sense in gittin' put under all the time, if you can't get to heaven for't arter all."

"Why, Huldah," said I, "what makes you insist on doing some great thing, to be saved, when Jesus has done everything for you, and heaven is free? I have a little hymn I want to give to you; it begins,—

‘ Nothing either great or small  
Remains for me to do ;  
Jesus did it, did it all,  
Long, long ago.’ ”

"I don't care a fig for your hymns an' songs," she said quite vehemently, knocking the dust from her broom; "I an't no notion 'er sittin' down the corner, and holdin' my hands, while salvation comes to me: 'tain't at all a likely notion; folks don't pick up money in the road. Most like they works their fingers to the bone for't."

“I can’t help that, Huldah; Jesus has done all the working: can’t you believe it?”

“Law sakes, Bertha!” she answered testily; “what good’s that goin’ to do me? I’m bad enough.”

“You mustn’t expect to be good of yourself, Huldah. You can never become fit to enter heaven by your own good works.”

“How then?” she asked, impatiently.

“If you give up trying by yourself, and throw yourself on his love and mercy for salvation, he will not cast you out; he will clothe you in his own righteousness.”

“I can’t make no head or tail out of it,” said Huldah.

“When Jesus died on the cross, Huldah, when the cruel people spit in his face, and beat him, when they laughed at him and mocked his sufferings, and when he cried out in agony, — it was for us, for you, that

you might be saved. What is all you can do after that, Huldah? Isn't that enough?"

"Did they do all that?" she said, with a vainly suppressed sob, and dashing a tear away; then, by way of apology, she muttered something about "them pesky flies." "Well, Bertha, you might about a'made that bed while you've been standin' round, but I s'pose I kin make it, if you're sot on it."

"Thank you, Huldah."

"I don't want no thanks. I am tryin' to be good," she said.

"But, Huldah, Jesus wants you to do right; only do it to please him, not to win heaven."

Presently, as I was dusting the parlors, I heard Aunt Martha's voice calling me from the little sitting-room.

"Yes, auntie," I answered, crossing the hall, and appearing in the doorway, with my duster, "did you want me?"



“How is this, dear?” she said anxiously, bending forward in her chair; “I gave my permission to your teaching a little boy; but didn’t you understand me? I never meant that you should have anything like a school. Huldah says you are expecting to teach school here. I’m sorry to disappoint you, dear; but really I could not have it; you know my head is so bad all the time, and the noise would be distressing.”

“Auntie, you and Huldah have made a great mistake; you understood me correctly in the first place; it is only one little boy.”

“Then that is all right, dear,” said Aunt Martha, pressing her head and leaning back in her chair; “hadn’t you better tell Huldah so? She is greatly troubled, and anxious to please you; she said you expected to spend all the morning in dusting the parlors and hunting for old school-books. I

feel greatly relieved ;” and Aunt Martha sighed and closed her eyes.

“ Is your head too bad to read, auntie ? ”

“ Yes, I had rather think now,” she replied.

So I left her, discharged my duty to Huldah, much to the relief of the latter, and finished the parlors before nine o’clock. As the clock struck the hour, I heard the click of the gate-latch. Straightening a chair here, and smoothing a tidy there, I passed out of the parlor to the front door. No Mr. Ansdale was in sight ; but, marching in a most independent manner up the gravel-walk, appeared my little pupil in prospective, holding up his head like a **very** gentleman, and keeping his hands firmly in his pockets.

“ Where’s Mr. Ansdale ? ” I asked.

The little fellow took off his cap. “ Well, ma’am,” he answered, “ see’n as I don’t know who he be, can’t tell where he be.”

“Why! the gentleman who was to come with you.”

“Oh! yes, ma’am; he’s took sick, sent his love to you, and wants you to come an see him.”

“Is he very sick?”

“No, ma’am, not partic’lar.”

“Will you come in and take your lesson?”

“Don’t care if I do;” and he mounted the piazza and stood by my side.

“Can you read?” I continued.

“That’s ’cordin’ as you call it; not mighty nice.”

“What’s your name?”

“Jack Peters; what’s yours?” asked the child.

“Miss Norton. Have you any brothers and sisters?”

“No, ma’am; we han’t nothin’ in the world but mother and me, two chairs, two plates, two knives, forks, and spoons, a bed,

and an old box ; that's all there is of us ;” and his eyes twinkled merrily.

“ How old are you ? ”

“ Nine, goin’ on ten. How old be you ? ”

“ You may come in, Jack,” I answered, rather disappointed in my pupil ; “ you may come into the house, and I will see what I can teach you.”

He folded his hands demurely behind him. “ That gentleman said I was to wipe my feet,” he said, hesitatingly.

I pointed to the door-mat, and then, quite satisfied at having obeyed the directions of his benefactor, he consented to follow. He seemed to have already acquired a strong affection for Mr. Ansdale, and I wondered if I could ever gain such an influence over him as had this acquaintance of a few days ; but Mr. Ansdale could influence any one as he chose, and it would always be for good.

“ Now, Jack,” I commenced, when we

were snugly seated in my little room,  
“what has Mr. Ansdale taught you?”

“I dun’no,” he said, rubbing his bump of memory into action; “s’pose you tell me; guess you know better’n I.”

“But, Jack,” I said, “you should remember; he told you about God, didn’t he? Did he tell you what God did for you?”

“Made me,” said he doubtfully.

“Yes, and what else did he make?”

“Made everything,” he said; “trees, I s’pose, and flowers, and you; them bright little things up in the sky too;” and he gave me a most sagacious glance from his bright, roving eyes.

“What are those bright little things up in the sky?” I asked with a smile, opening my Bible to begin the morning’s lesson.

“He said they was ’arths like this. I s’pose that’s the reason why they shines at night and not all day, — ’cause they don’t light the lamps up there till night, just

when we light ourn on this 'arth ;" and he looked gravely from my open window. " Sometimes they lights the lamps on one on 'em afore the others ; then that shines up first."

I smiled at the novel idea, and he seemed greatly pleased with his own solution of the mystery.

" But what else did God do for you, Jack ?" I asked.

He shook his head doubtfully.

" Didn't he send his blessed Son to die for you ?"

" *He* said so ; why ?" asked the boy.

" Why did he do it ?"

" Yes."

" Why, don't you know you have been a very bad boy all your life ?"

" No badder 'n other boys," he answered with a frown, kicking his toes against the side of my chair.

" No matter about other boys ; you have

been naughty very often, so had every one in this world; so God was displeased with them, and when they died in their sins he didn't think it right to take them to his pure heaven: would you?"

He looked at me intently: "Why didn't they be good, then?"

"They had been bad, and there was nothing to wash away their sin; and still they kept sinning; but God was very patient with them, with us, you and me, Jack; and he sent his only Son to this earth, who gave his blood to wash the sin away."

Jack looked very thoughtful.

"How long did he stay?" he asked.

"Thirty-three years."

"And what did he do all the time?" he asked. "Were the people very glad to see him when he came to make 'em good?"

"They hated and killed him, Jack," I answered.

“Did they kill him too?” he said; “I wouldn’t if I’d been alive.”

“But you make him feel almost as badly, Jack, — just as badly as you can, — when you don’t love him.”

“Do I? then I’ll love him right off,” he answered eagerly.

“I hope very much that you will, Jack. Now I’m going to read to you about him; listen;” and I read of his lowly birth at Bethlehem, and the bright star that heralded it.

“Wasn’t he good?” he said, as I closed the book and laid it aside; and he seemed to take very little interest in any other lessons that morning.

But I had already begun to love my little pupil; I had taken a deep interest in him, which increased from that day forth. The affection seemed to be reciprocated, and Jack tried to show his love in every imaginable way. Every day thenceforth my lit-



the table was adorned with a most fragrant bunch of wild flowers, fresh every morning, — field-daisies and clover, buttercups and wild roses, with occasionally hollyhocks from his mother's little dooryard. The most tempting apples he could pick up on his way were laid as friendship's offering at my feet ; and I never left the house that I did not meet him, by some incomprehensible means, just around the corner, hovering between the Hall and the cottage.

Nelly laughed at us both, but I did not care for that. I encouraged Jack's affection to the utmost of my ability ; while Mr. Ansdale, and Aunt Martha too, in her gentle manner, encouraged me. I did not need much incitement, however.

Mr. Ansdale, as Jack had told me, was quite ill, and I felt that I ought to go that afternoon to see him. I found him with a severe nervous headache, which continued for two or three days. Our Macaulay-les-

sons were forthwith dropped, and not resumed again, as school-duties claimed my attention. Dear Aunt Martha became troubled lest my time was too fully taken up.

“Bertie, love,” she said one afternoon, “are you sure that all these teachings and talkings are not wearying you too much, and trying your patience?”

We were sitting together on the piazza, she with her knitting-work, and I with a slate, setting a copy for Jack.

“Quite sure, auntie,” I answered; “you know I’m young, and little things don’t tire me.”

“Very true,” said Aunt Martha with a deep sigh, “but everything tires me; I have to sit all day long in my chair: if I move about I have a headache in consequence; I can’t do anything.”

“I think you do a great deal, Aunt Martha.”

“I can’t do any good, child ; I have been fretful and repining, I know ; but now that I’m beginning to love my Saviour — yes, I am, Bertie dear,” she said, gently stroking my hair as I looked up into her face ; “yes, I have found my Saviour, Bertie — I feel as if I want to work for him. I have been doing wrong all my life, and now I want to do right, and I find I must sit still ; I am bound.”

“Who has bound you, auntie ?” I asked.

“Why, God, darling ; I suppose I am feeling very wrong.”

“He wants you to serve him in this way, auntie. This is your work ; don’t you remember the little hymn, —

‘ More careful than to serve thee much,  
To please thee perfectly ’ ?

“That’s what you must do, auntie.”

“Please thee perfectly,” she repeated :  
“you are right, Bertie ; I will not complain, but I think still that I might have some

little child come to me, just as you are doing, dear, and teach him."

So she might, I thought; I might even give her Jack, for she almost loved him already; but then I could not bear to part with him. She would soon learn to love another, and Jack was so devoted to me; but I glanced over the various ragged groups to be found in our village, and I was conscious that it would require patient, wearisome labor on Aunt Martha's part to bring any one of them to a state of tolerable obedience; while Jack was very good and dutiful already, and I was much more able to struggle with obstacles than Aunt Martha. Still, I was unwilling to relinquish my little scholar.

"Well, dear, you will find one, will you?" inquired Aunt Martha: "how pleasant it would be if I could take Jack, and let you find one for yourself! but I'll not ask you to give him up."

I made no answer, but laid aside the slate with its rows of rounded characters, and sighed.

Just then the object of our thoughts appeared at the gate, with a large bouquet of golden-rod and sunflowers, and held them triumphantly forward as he rushed toward us.

“Miss Bertha! Miss Bertha!” he cried.

“Yes, dear.”

“The hollyhocks is all gone, but I bringed you these.”

“Thank you for bringing them, Jack; they are very pretty,” I said sadly. “Now sit here and talk with Aunt Martha awhile, and she will tell you the reason that I’m not going to teach you any more.” And I left them there on the steps, and turned away, with Jack’s great wondering eyes fastened on me in grieved surprise; and I crushed the flowers in my hand, and stifled a sob, as I went up to my little room.

## CHAPTER VII

### NELLY'S PROMISE.

**O**CTOBER was fast drawing toward its close, and winter was unquestionably approaching. Everything kept telling me that. I did not like winter; the very birds that I loved so dearly seemed to warble in my ear, as they spread their wings for flight, — “Summer has passed away, Bertie;” and every rustling leaf as it dropped to the ground shivered and said, — “Cold, cold!” Yes, it *was* cold, and brown, and wintry; and the fire in our little sitting-room had been kindled every day for a week, although I had begged Aunt Martha to defer that unmistakable sign of winter as long as possible, and

warm herself by sitting in the sunshine: but she loved winter, and I finally ceased my entreaties, and studied on the sunny end of the piazza every afternoon, until the cold winds absolutely drove me to the sitting-room and the fire.

Nelly was not so fastidious as I. Every day, with her books, she begged a welcome to the little rocking-chair by our bright fireside, and every day she repeated a dozen times, — “After all, winter is pleasant, Bertie,” though at every repetition I would smile sadly and shake my head, with a very dubious air.

“You ought to be glad, Bertie,” said Aunt Martha one day, “for winter will bring Richie.”

So I consoled myself, as Richie had endeavored to do two months before, with the thought of Christmas, and found my prospects becoming brighter; while Nelly talked of skating and sleigh-rides, Christ-

mas dinners and sociables, until she fairly imagined winter had already arrived.

It was a bright Tuesday afternoon ; so bright and warm that I had ventured to draw back from the fire and raise the window a little, — for Aunt Martha, strengthened by the bracing air, had set off to walk to the post-office, — and Nelly and I were studying our lessons together, in anticipation of a visit to the Hall when they should be finished. Nelly was very restless, however, and not much inclined to apply herself to her book.

“ Bertie,” she said suddenly, “ don’t you remember Mr. Ansdale promised to show us those curious old paintings to-day ? I am so eager to see them ; I am very fond of paintings, or anything of the kind. Bertie, don’t you think I might make an artist ? ”

“ With application I don’t doubt you



could, Nelly," I said, without raising my eyes from my book.

"With application, of course, dear ; and I know you think I will never gain that, but I have it for some things. You think that I leave everything after one or two trials, and never think of anything long, but it is not so ; you are all wrong. I suppose you think I have forgotten all my good resolutions of last summer, but I have not ; I often think of them, and I am sure if I should try I might be an artist, application and all."

And Nelly pushed back the soft mass of hair from her forehead, and gazed into the fire with a flushed face and dreamy eye, like a veritable artist already, or a beautiful study for the pencil of art.

"Are you laughing at me, Bertie ?" and she looked up quickly, with a world of mischief in her sunny eyes. "I'll laugh at you the next time you talk of being a mission-

ary, and tell you you never could have the *application*. I'll tell Richie, and make him laugh at you too."

"I wouldn't laugh at you for the world, Nelly dear," I answered, closing my book. "I hope you may be as great a painter as ever this country or any other has produced, if you like. I think you draw beautifully already; I never expect to come up to you: and I shall hope to see you a Rosa Bonheur, or even greater. Now are you satisfied, Nelly?"

"What a pretty speech, to be sure! I didn't ask for all that encouragement;" and Nelly laughed merrily, and once more bent over her book; while I sat watching her, until the door opened and Aunt Martha appeared.

"Only one letter, dear," she said; "one letter, from Richard to you;" and she handed me the brown envelope containing one of those letters which were worth fifty

others to me, and then seated herself in her easy-chair waiting for me to read it; while Nelly, too pre-occupied to study, leaned back dreamily in her corner, fashioning marvelous pictures in her brain, which were some day to be laid on canvas.

Richard's letter was frank and affectionate, as his letters always were; but it was somewhat different from the others too. "They are having a great religious revival in school," he wrote, "and many of the fellows are very serious about it; there were twenty admitted into the church last Sabbath." Then he spoke about the Christmas holidays, and the great pleasure he expected in coming home, and gave me a glowing account of some ball-matches and cricket, in all which he expected his sister to be as much interested as himself. And the letter was concluded with messages to Aunt Martha, Nelly, and Huldah, "with his chief and best love to his darling

sister," after the manner in which Richard always closed his letters to me.

"Is he well, dear?" asked Aunt Martha, as I closed the letter.

"Yes, auntie, and speaks a deal about Christmas."

"Dear boy!" said Aunt Martha with a gentle smile; "we must make it as pleasant as we can for him."

"And he sends his love, auntie, to you, and to Nelly."

"Many thanks," said Nelly demurely, waking out of her dreams; "some people always have plenty of love to spare in a letter. He forgot even to bid me good-bye."

"Ah! but you weren't to be seen, Nelly," I answered, scarcely thinking of what I said, for I had bowed my head on my hand, and was silently pondering a certain portion of that letter; considering how much good a word from me might do for Rich-

ard now, and whether it were not most surely my duty to write that word.

“ Ah ! I don’t want to,” I said to myself, “ for Richie does n’t like to have me speak to him about such things ; besides, he might laugh at me too ; ” and I sighed wearily and leaned back in my chair.

“ What are you cogitating, Bertha ? ” said Nelly. “ We’ll not reach the Hall this afternoon.”

“ Where are your lessons, Nelly ? — finished ? ” I asked.

“ Put to sleep on the table, together with my conscience ; come, don’t preach, love ; it is wretched for my health, all this application ; get your hat,” said Nelly coaxingly.

“ But do study your lessons first,” I said ; “ Mr. Ansdale will be very likely to ask you if you have.”

“ And I will pucker up my mouth in my most submissive manner, and say, ‘ Yes,

sir,' and you can't deny that I've studied them, only I don't know them yet. Come, I promise they shall be finished by to-morrow morning, Bertie."

I was thinking of my letter, so I rose mechanically, kissed auntie good-bye, as I always did, and went with her. It was a most delightful day for a walk of any kind. To be sure, there were dead, withered leaves under foot, and no sweet songs greeted us from the trees and bushes, but the sky was cloudless, and the sun's warm rays just tempered the cool October air.

"Let's not go," said Nelly. It's pleasanter walking. Come, Bertie, we'll revisit the scene of your blackberrying expedition, and perhaps we shall meet a second Mr. Ansdale."

"I should prefer the old," I said decidedly. "How quickly our artist has forgotten the curious old paintings!" Nelly laughed, and consented to go to the Hall.

Mr. Ansdale was awaiting us in the library ; but I was afraid that he would not have missed us much had we decided to go the other way. He was seated by the ivy-crowned window, watching the motion of the feathery clouds over their azure background, — his thoughts apparently as far away as the clouds, and as pleasing, until we startled him. Then he arose and received us cordially, as he always did.

“ I have been thinking of you,” he said, “ not just when you entered, it is true ; for my thoughts have taken a wide range this afternoon. But you see I have made preparations for you ;” and he pointed to the table, and the works of art placed on it for our inspection.

“ Sit down and rest,” he said, “ and I’ll tell you where I have been traveling in thought.”

“ Where, sir ?” asked Nelly, throwing

off her hat, and seating herself unceremoniously at his feet.

“To India, Nelly. What do you think of that?”

“I think that you must have been there, or your thoughts wouldn’t have the courage to take the journey alone,” she answered fearlessly, playing with the tassels of the window-curtain. “My thoughts don’t make voyages to such outlandish places; but I’ve known them to go farther.”

“Where was that, Nelly?” he asked.

“I have sometimes thought of heaven,” she answered, “and that is very far away.”

“It may not be very far for some of us, if we are ready to go there,” he said gently.

Nelly looked thoughtful.

“Your thoughts have been there, Nelly; are you prepared to go there yourself?” he said gravely. “If God called you to die to-night, have you sought your Sav-



your's righteousness, in which to appear before him ? ”

“ No, sir,” she said frankly.

“ Are you safe, then ? ” he asked gently.

“ No, sir ; ” and Nelly sighed. “ I often think of it lately.”

“ Will you promise me to be so before you go to sleep to-night ? ”

Nelly looked up in utter astonishment. “ Why ! I can't, Mr. Ansdale,” she whispered.

“ Prayer is very powerful. Promise me, and I shall be praying for you. You can do nothing of yourself at any time ; but God is ready to help you. Ask him now. He may take his Spirit from you, you know not when.”

“ I can't, Mr. Ansdale, I can't promise,” she said.

“ I want you to make a determination. Promise me ; God will answer your prayers.”

Nelly looked over at me as if for help, and said desperately, "I promise."

"It is a promise," he said. "I will tell you of my Indian travels some other afternoon. Now you are rested, and we will look at the paintings."

Very curious indeed they were, copied from the world-renowned artists of long ago. Nelly seemed to take a kind of restless, excited pleasure in looking at them. But she was nervous and pre-occupied, and scarcely heard what Mr. Ansdale was saying, I know.

"You have much taste for art," he said at length.

"Yes, sir," said Nelly mechanically.

"I am very glad; you must let me see some of your sketches."

"Thank you," said Nelly in a subdued way, rising to leave. "It is growing late," she said abruptly.

Mr. Ansdale followed us to the door, and

I heard him say softly as we went out, " You will remember your promise, Nelly ? " and Nelly looked up into his eyes in a troubled way, and answered " Yes."

I seated myself at my window, as soon as I reached home, to answer Richard's letter, — for I made it a matter of principle as well as of pleasure to answer his letters the day I received them, — that I might send my reply by the early morning mail. Yet in this letter I spoke of everything save that which I should have mentioned ; congratulated him on his victory at that wonderful ball-match, dwelt long on the expected Christmas pleasures, — filled three pages and began the fourth. " Speak the word in season," said Conscience ; but, " No, I should only displease Richard," I answered ; far more careful, for the time, of pleasing my brother than my Saviour, and forgetting Richard's own motto, which he

had given me. I finished my fourth page, and folded the letter.

"Bertha," said Huldah's voice in the entry, "I'm goin' down street; if you've got any letters writ, I'll fetch 'em along."

So the letter was quickly sealed and given into Huldah's keeping.

"Your aunt's in the kitchen, a waitin' for you; and you needn't be bothered nor nothin', thinkin' about the readin' to-night, 'cause I won't be to hum to hear it. Keep a mindin' your aunt, now, sos't she don't git out of her cheer. That little ragamuffin Jack's a worryin' the ideas out of her head;" and Huldah, fully satisfied with having discharged her duty toward Aunt Martha and myself, walked off with my letter.

But I felt through it all that I had done very wrong, had proved myself an unfaithful servant to my Lord, and an unfaithful sister to Richard. And as I stood by the

window for a moment, and saw Huldah pass out of the garden-gate with my letter in her hand, I called to her, with the half-framed intention of writing another in its place. But she paid no attention to the call, and passed on toward the village, while I turned slowly from the window, and went down to Aunt Martha. I had always been accustomed to ask her for some message to Richard, but even that I had forgotten, and she noticed it.

“You have finished your letter, love?” she asked, as I entered and took my seat at table.

“Yes, Aunt Martha; I’m sorry I forgot you.”

“I’m sorry too, dear; I had a message for him; but never mind.”

“Was it important, auntie?” I asked.

“I wanted to say a little word for his good, Bertie,—you understand; but it can’t be helped now.”

Yes, I understood. Aunt Martha, the disciple of a few weeks, would do her duty, and stand by her colors, while I had shrunk from the one and deserted the other.

“ You won’t write again without telling me, Bertie ? ” asked Aunt Martha, as she quietly sipped her tea.

“ I will try to remember you, auntie ; I am sorry.”

“ I don’t blame you, Bertha ; I should have spoken, but you are always so used to telling me. I know young people are apt to forget ; we can’t expect them to be as thoughtful as their elders. I had a very poor memory when I was young, so I have great consideration for you. I would write to him myself if I could, but it makes my head ache so severely. Did you and Nelly have a pleasant time at the Hall ? ”

“ Very, auntie,” I answered abstractedly.

“ It must be a delightful place ; I should like to go there myself. I have not been

inside the door for eleven years ; that was before I ever saw you, Bertha."

" You must go again some day, Aunt Martha."

" I want to. Jack talks of it a great deal. That boy gets on very nicely, Bertha ; have you found some one to fill his place ? "

I was heartily ashamed to confess it, but I had not, and told her so.

" Why not, dear ? I would not have taken him if I had known how much you thought of him : you may have him back now if you will."

" No, auntie, it is not that. I have done wrong, I know, and I have let myself go on wrong."

" Then you didn't ask God to help you go right," she said. " Have you felt right lately ? "

" No, auntie."

“What was it? Did God leave you, or have you wandered from him, Bertie?”

“I have done wrong,” I said; “God never leaves us.”

“Then it was not God’s will, but yours, dear.”

“I will ask him to set me right, auntie.”

“You won’t be happy until he has,” she said softly. “Mrs. Winsley was telling me yesterday of a dear little girl, an orphan child. Her mother has a large family to support, and can’t afford to give her decent clothes to attend school. When you feel right, I would go and see her, love; I thought of you immediately, when she told me of the child, and proposed the plan to her. She was greatly pleased.”

So was I now. “How old a child, Aunt Martha?”

“About ten years, I believe; she has had some instruction, and can read quite



well, but she has little opportunity for improvement at home."

"I will go to see her, Aunt Martha, if possible to-morrow," I said, rising and wheeling back her arm-chair from the table and preparing to light the lamp; for in these fall evenings darkness came upon us early, and the chill air forbade even the thought of an hour on the pleasant piazza. So, having no Huldah to read to, I drew up my stool to Aunt Martha's feet, and asked what I should read.

"The Bible, dear," she said, "and then one of Ryle's little hymns."

I did as she wished; and as I finished reading the latter, auntie took the book from my hand and opened it.

"Who wrote this?" she asked, pointing to my brother's motto.

"Richie."

"Dear boy," said auntie with a sigh, as she handed me the book; and then we parted for the night.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### *RICHARD'S LETTER.*

**I** WAS up very early the next morning, and out in the garden before breakfast, picking flowers for the sitting-room table. I always loved to rise and walk at that hour ; everything seemed different then from the same place after our early meal ; the air felt so much purer, and the flowers, laden with dew, were a thousand times prettier than the same flowers when the sun had dried them. But they had almost vanished now, — going, — going, — gone ; and the little bouquet of stiff artemisias that I held in my hand formed a striking contrast to the June roses, the sweet heliotrope, and pure

white lilies that I had gathered so many times at that hour. Still, I stood at the gate and displayed them triumphantly to the eyes of any who were passing. They were not many ; we counted few early risers among our neighbors.

Presently I saw Nelly tripping down the road toward the gate, her face one gleam of sunshine.

“ Bertie,” she cried, as she came up to me, all out of breath, and burying her face in my flowers, “ how sweet ! you’re half fairy, and live among birds and flowers.”

“ And you in sunshine,” I rejoined, kissing her.

“ Yes, I feel sunshiny this morning. I’m coming in to breakfast to give you and auntie a taste of it. I don’t mean that you haven’t it already, you know ; but one can’t have too much in the fall.”

“ Did you keep your promise, Nelly ? ”

“ Indeed I did. I want to tell you all

about it ; come and sit on the piazza with me ; ” and she wound her arm around my waist. “ You see, Bertie, I didn’t know what to do when I went home yesterday afternoon. I thought I had made a rash promise that I could not keep ; I wanted to go off to my room right after supper, but we had company, — company that I could not leave, — and I was not at liberty until ten o’clock. Then I went to my room, and I prayed, Bertie ; I never prayed so before in my life. I felt that I had neglected God so long that he would not hear me ; and I was so sorry, Bertie, and determined I would not forget him any more. Then I remembered Mr. Martin’s text last Sabbath, — “ Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners ; ” and I don’t know how I did it, Bertie, but I just went to him, and he gave me peace. So I went to sleep and dreamed of him,

and that he called me his lam<sup>b</sup>. Do you think I am a Christian, Bertha ? ”

“ I hope so,” I said, kissing her.

“ Thank you ; ” and the sun, overshadowed for a moment, came out in full beauty again.

“ Now I must go and tell Aunt Martha and Huldah. Oh ! I forgot ; Huldah won't care : poor Huldah ! and you must tell Richie too ”

Dear little light-hearted Nelly ! We had a happy breakfast that morning ; for she scattered brightness all around her.

“ I came off before any one was dressed,” she said, “ and I want to run back before school-time. Oh, Bertie, I feel so strange and happy, as if I had just begun to exist ! Those poor, neglected lessons ! do you remember yesterday afternoon ? and there are the books on the table yet. I have not a moment to spare ; I feel like a bee in a plantation of honeysuckles ; don't you, Ber-

tie?" So she seated herself most diligently to the preparation of her lessons; and I can bear witness that she had never known them so well as on that day: but those were only the beginning of a long series of good lessons.

I wrote again that afternoon to Richard, although I did not doubt he would answer my last letter before receiving this; and the letter was again intrusted to Huldah. On Thursday and Friday I looked vainly for an answer to my first; the delay rather surprised me, for Richie was always so punctual; but I almost hoped he would wait until he should receive my last, that he might see I had repented of my fault.

Saturday came, that precious season, a golden day in the eyes of almost every school-girl,—so, at least, it had always been to Nelly and me. After our early dinner I arrayed myself for a walk to the

Hall, intending to stop at the post-office on my way.

As I reached the gate I heard Huldah calling to me to stop, and turning back I saw that she was coming to meet me.

"Bertha," she said, "you'd better mail this 'ere letter, bein' as how you're bound for the office. It slipped my mind t'other night;" and she handed me my second letter, given her on Wednesday.

"Oh, Huldah, I am so sorry!" I said reprovingly.

"So'm I, but it can't be helped now. There's no use in cryin' for spilt milk."

No, there certainly was not. So I placed my letter in my pocket and walked on, musing sadly over Huldah's thoughtlessness. There was a letter for me at the office, from Richard, too, but I delayed opening it; and, thinking that Mr. Ans-  
dale would allow me to read it at the Hall, I carried it there with me.

Mr. Ansdale was not very well that afternoon. I found him resting on the library sofa, deeply engaged in a book, and his step was feeble as he rose to welcome me.

“Bright and rosy, Bertie! you and Nelly always bring sunshine with you. Here I have been poring over a ponderous volume of Bacon, until my head aches, when the door flies open and admits a morsel of light literature, in the form of one of my fairies. Sit down and let me read *you*, Bertie. Ah! you have somewhat to read as well; and you have no need to wait. I know how anxious young ladies always are to penetrate the mysteries of those little manuscripts;” and then he handed me a chair and bade me read my letter. And as I read, his eyes were fastened on my face, scanning every flitting emotion.

It was a very short letter, and it ran thus:—



“DARLING SISTER, —

“I have your letter, received on Wednesday, lying before me, and I have been reading it for the third time; it is a kind and pleasant letter, but I was disappointed, Bertie.

“When I wrote you, though I said very little of our great revival, yet I felt very deeply, and there was no one but you to whom I cared to speak of it. I thought you would encourage me, dear, and show me the right way; but it was a hard thing to do, perhaps. And so I willfully, and very wrongly, too, shunned those who might have done me good, and waited for your letter. Bertie, dear, you missed standing by your colors then. I don't blame you now. I should have written you what I felt; but at first I tried to forget that I had ever thought of my soul; yet God remembered me and had mercy on me. Let us thank him, Bertie! And now

that I love my Saviour more than all, my sister is a thousand times dearer to me than ever before, and I forgive her from my very heart. Pray for me, and love me, darling, and remember our motto."

I bowed my face on the sofa and burst into tears. Mr. Ansdale had been looking at me intently during the reading; now he said gently, —

"What is it, Bertie?" and I placed the letter in his hand.

Then there was a long silence; for I was weeping while Mr. Ansdale read. Finally I heard him fold the letter and place it in the envelope; then, more tenderly than even Aunt Martha would have done it, he drew me to his side and placed my head on his shoulder, smoothing back the hair from my forehead as Richie used to do when I cried at parting with him.

"Dear little Bertie," he whispered, "is

not God as ready to forgive you as your brother?"

I checked my sobs for a moment, and listened to him.

"Bertie, don't you believe it?" I made no answer, but lay perfectly still in my resting-place, until the sobs were quieted.

"We will ask him," he said; and, rising, he drew me to my knees by his side, and prayed for me, earnestly, fervently; and when he had finished I breathed a voiceless prayer for myself.

"Now, Bertie, I would advise you to write another letter," he said, holding both my hands in his, and looking into my face.

"I did; I wrote to him the very next day, but the letter never was sent: it was not my fault. Dear Mr. Ansdale, I am always failing." He placed his arm tenderly round me, drew me up close to him, and pressed his lips to my forehead.

"If you keep near to Jesus, you will

grow strong in his strength day by day, darling Bertie; and we will never fail in heaven. I have never seen this brother, have I? and you have never told me of him. What is he like?"

"Richie? What *is* he like?" I said. "I think he is like himself only; but he is such a good brother, Mr. Ansdale, — so kind, so generous! I should like to have you see him."

"I hope I shall some day, Bertie. When will he return?"

"At Christmas."

"Ah! then I must have you all here for a Christmas dinner. Will you come?"

I think my face must have answered him, for he seemed to consider his invitation accepted, and bade me good-bye with a smile.

It was a lovely walk home in the soft sunset, on the pretty carpet of bright autumn leaves; for although I would have

liked the leaves better overhead, still they were pretty anywhere. I walked slowly homeward, busied with my thoughts, thinking what a noble Christian Richard would make, for he would never need the reproof he had given to me, he would pray so constantly for strength to keep from falling. Then, too, it was not his nature to be ashamed of anything he loved, or thought right. "And if it is your nature," said a voice within me, "there is all the more need that you should ask for strength to struggle against it." So I did ask for strength, and I received it.

As I lifted the gate-latch, I felt a hand on my shoulder, and turned to meet Nelly's bright face.

"Isn't it fine, Bertie," she said, "for us every-day mortals to have our paths strewn with flowers, — we'll pretend they are flowers, you know, for they are quite as bright, — and to walk like queens or prin-

cesses? You are some royal Saxon lady, Bertha, and I — I — ”

“ Am Nelly ! ” I finished mischievously.

“ Yes, Nelly is so unqueenly, so undignified, you can’t make anything of it, unless you take Helen instead.”

“ I don’t like that very queenly Bertha, Nelly. I wish my mother had given me her own name, after waiting so long before I was named at all.”

“ How was that ? ” asked Nelly.

“ I was the only daughter, you know, and it was hard to decide on a name for me, so they always called me ‘ baby,’ and pet names, until at length mamma had almost resolved to call me Alice, for herself. But she found such a dear friend on the steamer coming to America, — a sweet, grave lady who was dying with consumption, and who took a great fancy to me. She was a comfort to my mother, too, and when she asked to change my name and give me hers, that

she might comfort herself with the thought that she was still remembered on earth, — for she was quite alone, Nelly, — my mother was very glad to consent ; yet I never remember her calling me Bertha. I think I like Alice best.”

“ I don’t,” said Nelly lightly ; “ I love you as Bertie, and Bertie alone. I should quite desert you if you turned about, Bertie. All the lessons for Monday are finished ! — try to realize it, will you ? — and I have come to escort you to Mrs. Winsley’s for a twilight call, and then return and help you with supper. Don’t go in ; come ! ”

“ But, Nelly dear, it is almost time for supper now.”

“ We will only stay ten minutes, — *five*, if you like,” she pleaded ; so I yielded, and went with her. She continued, —

“ Where have you been this afternoon ? I have been uneasy, and wanted to see you

so much, and yet I was greatly afraid you would come ; for I knew if you did the temptation to leave my books would be almost irresistible. I am very glad you did not."

"Thank you !" I said laughingly. "I have been to the Hall."

"What did you do ?"

"Read a letter, talked, and —"

"And what ?"

"Cried."

Nelly looked very inquiringly in my face for a moment, and then said, "Was the letter from Richie ?"

"Yes," I replied. Richie was my only correspondent.

She did not speak again for some time ; Nelly never sought to pry into the secrets of others. "I will show you the letter, Nelly. I will give it to you when you leave to-night, but I don't want you to read it now," I said.



“Don't show it to me at all, dear, if you don't want to,” she answered.

“But I do want to, before you go. Richie has become a Christian, dear Nelly.”

“Oh, Bertie, I am so glad!” she said, clapping her hands. “Richie, Aunt Martha, you, and I;” and she threw her arms around my neck and kissed me warmly. “And there is Mrs. Winsley at the door, ready to receive us, Bertie. Do you think she guessed we were coming?”

Yes, Mrs. Winsley was standing on her quaint little piazza, her knitting-work in her hand, and her face wreathed in its brightest smiles, waiting for us to come up.

I had often been there with Aunt Martha before, and sometimes with Nelly, who was fond of making visits; so I felt quite at home in her little summer parlor. She drew up easy-chairs for us both by the blazing grate, and, seating herself with her knitting-work, began to talk to us.

“Bertha,” she said presently, “your aunt and I were talking of a little girl the other day, — one of Mrs. McKay’s children, who lives near the Hall. She would be a smart girl if she were properly taught, and your aunt thought you might teach her. She is rather pert and inquisitive, but you can soon break her of that, and make a nice child of her, if you try. But don’t think it will be no trouble; if you do you will certainly be disappointed. Are you willing to try? If you are, I will see the mother, and send the child to you.”

“Yes, I should like to teach her, Mrs. Winsley; I have often seen her, and I like her face,” I answered.

“Very well, it is all right, then,” said the old lady, knitting away most vigorously on her stocking.

“Can you knit stockings, children?” she asked.

Nelly looked inquiringly at me

“ I can wear them out, and mend them,” she answered, laughing.

“ My husband never wears a stocking but those I knit for him,” she continued ; “ and when I was as old as you and Bertha, I knit all the stockings for my father and eight brothers.”

Nelly opened her blue eyes very wide. “ But where’s the use, Mrs. Winsley, for us ? ” she asked ; “ we’ve no one to make them for. Father dislikes them intensely.”

“ There are plenty of poor people around who would *like* them intensely, child,” she said.

“ Will you teach me to knit them, Mrs. Winsley ? ” asked Nelly eagerly.

“ And I will apply to Aunt Martha,” I cried ; “ and then, Nelly, when we have once learned, we will make stockings for the village.”

“ For the *feet* of the village, dear ? ” she

said archly, endeavoring to take a stitch in Mrs. Winsley's work, which was kindly yielded to her.

"I want to make some for Jack, to begin," she said, "if you won't be jealous, Bertie; he is sadly in want of them."

The lesson was not long, for Nelly learned quickly, and she was soon well acquainted with all the mysteries; and then we remembered that we should be late for supper, and keep Aunt Martha waiting; a thought which was followed by a hasty adieu and a still more hasty walk home.

That evening, after Nelly had left, and the reading with Huldah was finished, I seated myself to write to Richie; and, though bed-time was approaching and the letter was long, it was completed that evening and given to Huldah to be sent in the early mail. And I dreamed that night of a grand Christmas dinner at the Hall,

where were Richie and Nelly, Mr. and Mrs. Winsley, Aunt Martha and I, and seated at the head of the table, in that grand old dining-room of Ansdale Hall, was its owner, smiling upon us all.



## CHAPTER IX.

### *WINTER.*

**W**INTER came on very swiftly when summer had once taken leave of us, bringing snow and frost, ice and sleet; or, as Nelly said, “sleighting, skating, coasting, and bright warm fires.” She looked on the bright side, and I tried very hard to follow her example; but from the time of the first real snow-storm, when we knew winter had fairly arrived, I began to look forward to the first violets. Nelly and I vied with each other every spring as to who should find them; and we were usually equally successful.

But the violets were far off now. The

snow was two feet deep in the little garden, and still falling in white masses from the dull, heavy sky. Jack had manfully shoveled off our gravel-path, but the snow soon covered it once more, and then he made his appearance, shovel in hand, again,—anything for Aunt Martha and me; it seemed as if the child could not do enough for us. I had made the sacrifice long ago, and I did not regret it; yet still I could not help wishing sometimes that I had my little pupil back.

My little girl had come, little Katy McKay, and very pert and inquisitive I found her at first; but she was getting over that. I shall always remember the day of her first lesson; she seemed to take particular notice of every one's dress, and examined mine most intently for a long time, while I was talking to her. Finally Huldah entered my room with a message from Aunt Martha. Katy looked at her for a moment

with the utmost contempt, and then remarked, "Ye don't wear nice gownds, a bit, Miss Huldah, an' it's niver a bit so nice as me own mother's blue meriny, shure."

Huldah's eyes flashed fire at this. "You little ragamuffin," she said, "I'd like to know who give your ma her blue meriny, if it wan't myself,—the dress I sot more by than all the others put together!"

"Katy didn't know you gave it to her mother," I ventured by way of pacification; but now that Katy *did* know it, she had no mind to keep her own counsel, and that very afternoon Mrs. McKay appeared in a bright red striped calico, and bearing the blue merino on her arm, which she immediately returned to its former owner; asserting that she was fully able now to "buy her own clo's, and wouldn't have people insultin' her childer."

Huldah looked rather ashamed, I thought, as she received the dress from the angry



woman, but she made no remonstrances. However, after Mrs. McKay had left, she asked me in private what she should do with it, as she could never wear it again. I advised her to make a dress for Katy of it, and, if there should be sufficient, for her little sister as well. But Huldah would not do that, and there the matter rested.

And now the first of December had come, and a very cold first day of winter it was. The wind drove around the corner of the house with furious sweeps, rattled down the chimneys, shook the windows, and crept through the cracks of the doors; while Aunt Martha and I piled the wood upon the sitting-room grate, and Huldah brought hot coffee, "to put some warmth in us," she asserted.

"I can't bear to go to school to-day, Aunt Martha," I said, as we seated ourselves at table.

"I don't like to have you go either, dear, but I suppose you ought."

"You have no idea what a dreadful walk it is, especially down by the old mill; and to-day it will be worse than ever," I said, glancing toward the window.

"Perhaps you had better not go," she suggested kindly. "You have so severe a cold, too, and your overshoes are badly torn."

I thought for a few moments; much as I dreaded the walk, I disliked to be absent from school.

"Nelly always stops for me, auntie. If she ventures, I will."

"Very well," she answered.

The sitting-room had not seemed so cozy to me for a long time, and the exchange from the cold dining-room was delightful. Huldah lingered as long as possible around the table, inventing little services that she

might render us, until her imagination seemed exhausted.

“Miss Marthy,” she said, as she finally turned to go, “’tan’t fit fur Bertha to go to school to-day, no how ; she’d git in a’most up to her knees ; you hadn’t ought to let her.”

“I don’t think I will, Huldah ; it is too bad, isn’t it ? ”

“I guess you’d think it was, if you’d bin round to the post-office, where I’ve bin, and that an’t nothin’ at all to what it is by the mill.”

“You had better not go, Bertie ; if Nelly comes we will keep her.”

“If you don’t go,” said Huldah, standing with the door-knob in her hand, — “if you don’t go, Bertha, I shouldn’t mind if you come in bimeby and read me a bit whilst I’m ironin’.”

As I smiled and assented, Huldah took

her departure. Presently she made a new errand, to visit our cozy apartment.

“The skatin’ will be all spiled,” she said to me, “and you girls will have to put up with walkin’.”

“And sleighing, Huldah. Oh, auntie, do you know Mr. Ansdale has invited Nelly and me to a sleigh-ride on Saturday? He says we may choose our own route, and he will let us have everything as we like; and Nelly and I think it would be delightful to go as far as the old school-house, the other side of the hollow, and carry our luncheon with us. Then you know we could kindle a fire in the old school-room. and be cozy and comfortable. What do you say? Do you like it, auntie?”

“Certainly, if Mr. Ansdale approves; I’m never afraid to trust you with him.”

“And yet you have never spoken to him, auntie.”

“He has been here but once, you know,

dear," she answered; "and you know how it was then,—how you were in the midst of your ginger-snaps."

"And you in the midst of a headache, auntie; of course you could not see him; but I am going to bring him here some day to see you especially."

Aunt Martha looked pleased, and drew her chair from the table close to the fire; so I found my knitting-work and seated myself by her side.

"You see, auntie, I have dropped some stitches, and can't pick them up; what shall I do? I am in such a hurry to finish these that I have hardly patience to knit straight along."

"You shouldn't drop stitches, love," she said; "it makes great trouble in a stocking sometimes; just as, when we make little mistakes in life, they lead to greater ones, until we can scarcely gather up the stitches at all. Don't you see?"

“Yes, auntie. How nicely you do it! thank you;” and I took my stocking once more, looking as well as if the stitches had never been dropped. Aunt Martha was marvelous at knitting.

“Auntie,” I said, “I wonder if you would be as good at picking up the stitches we drop in life.”

“I doubt it, dear; they can’t often be remedied at all.”

Then we sat and mused for a while, and still Nelly did not come.

“Auntie, shall I go?”

“Where?” she asked, starting suddenly from her reverie.

“To school, auntie. What were you thinking of?”

“Only of some dropped stitches, dear; dropped years ago, when I was young. I’ve never been able to gather them up. No, don’t go to school; the storm is too

bad. Go and read to Huldah if she wants you."

So I found my Bible and hymns, and adjourned to the kitchen.

Huldah need not have made so many excuses to leave so pleasant a place. It was, as Nelly termed it, something of a hive, spotless, and bright with a most delightfully blazing fire, — in which respect it was *not* like a hive. She drew up a chair for me before that very attractive object, and then stood looking at me.

"Do you know, Bertha," she said, "I've bin thinkin', and I think I acted kinder mean about that blue meriny; don't you? You see I was put out at the disgracefulness of that child, and I never thought what I was doin'."

"I don't think you acted right, Huldah, to lose your patience so; but I think if you had given it to her from love to Christ, and

not to earn heaven, you wouldn't have lost your temper."

"That's nonsense, Bertha; the idee of my goin' an givin' myself to Christ just as I am, when I han't done nuthin' good fust, — when I'm all bad from top to toe. I was goin' to do lots of good things, without tellin' on't either, but you told me 'twan't no 'count."

"But, Huldah, Jesus does not want you to do good first. He wants you to come just as you are; to come now, and then do good."

"Does it say that in the Bible?" she asked, irresolutely.

"Yes. I will read it to you. 'Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.' 'Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' It does not say, Go and be good first; then come."

"No! it don't," she answered; "but it's



kinder hard to think on't, Bertha, I've been so bad heaps of times. I used to have a sister, who turned Catholic; and she'd half kill herself, and do all sorts of things to git to heaven, and I kinder got her idees into my head."

"But, then, they were all wrong, you know."

"I s'pose they was."

"And now you will do the right way? Ask God to give you a new heart; you can do nothing of yourself: pray for his Spirit, and he will give it to you, if you truly want it."

"S'pose you go at the book now," she said.

"What shall I read, Huldah? have you thought of anything you would like to hear?"

"Read about some old critter like me gittin' good, like I an't," she said.

I read to her the story of Paul, and

she liked it very much. Noiselessly she moved around the kitchen, setting down the irons so very carefully, and pausing occasionally when she was most interested, — she had never heard it before, — and when I had finished she said, —

“Mebby, if you leave the book in here, I kin spell out at it myself bimeby.” So I left it for her.

Nelly and I passed that entire day without seeing each other, which was a rather novel occurrence. All day the snow fell softly, steadily, until, as I looked out of the window in the gathering twilight, the sky seemed only a darker shading of the earth, and the whole, sky and earth, one vast fleecy cloud.

While I was standing there I heard steps, muffled by the snow, on the piazza, and a knock at the door. I darted to answer it.

“Don’t go out in the cold, love,” said

Aunt Martha, shivering over the grate.  
“Huldah will open the door.”

“But I caught a glimpse from the window, auntie, and I think it is Jack, with a letter; a letter from Richie, Aunt Martha.”

She ceased her expostulations at that, and gave me leave to go; but Huldah was before me, and in two minutes I had Jack and the letter both in by the fire.

“Now read, dear, and see what he says.”

That was a very unnecessary injunction of Aunt Martha. “Home in three weeks, auntie,—three short weeks,—to spend two long weeks at home;” which was a rather strange way to render it, as I should have learned from experience that the weeks at home were by far the shortest.

Aunt Martha smiled. “You will have to introduce him to your new friend,” she said.

“Mr. Ansdale? Yes; and we will have

such pleasant times getting ready for him ! won't we, auntie ? And then Christmas at the Hall, you know ; of course you will be there ;" and Aunt Martha assented to all that I said, and rejoiced with me.

So I folded my letter, put it in my pocket, and returned to my watch at the window.



## CHAPTER X.

### *RICHARD AT HOME.*

**Y**ES! Richard was actually coming. For three long weeks I had waited patiently, and, school-girl-like, kept a card on my bureau, with all those intervening days marked out on it, merely for the delight of erasing one every morning, with the pleasant consciousness that there were fewer left before the all-important twenty-third; for Christmas was coming on Monday, and Richard would anticipate it by two days.

They were very great events, those holiday visits; greater even than the days themselves. We were so alone in our home, Aunt Martha and I, seeing so little

company, and stepping so little from the old routine of every-day duties ; whereas when Richie came he revolutionized everything, even Aunt Martha herself. He innocently transformed our little sitting-room into a workshop, wherein he cut and fashioned all his marvelous machines, and other inventions, the which I never understood, but I took none the less pleasure in watching their progress. Then, oh, the black footprints he invariably left in the entry every time he ventured beyond the doorstep, and the delicate muslin curtains that he would wrinkle so in putting back ! But Richie never noticed these things, and although they troubled Aunt Martha greatly, she very seldom hinted her annoyance in any way to the dear boy. I liked them, — these strange innovations ; they gave a novel air to the old home, and I only wished they might last a little longer. It was so pleasant to come in from a walk

with Nelly to find the unusual appearance of misplaced books and chairs, with that dear pleasant face by the fireside ; and, taking the book or work from his hands, to sit down by his side and hear long stories of boarding-school life and boarding-school frolics.

He was once more coming home ; and all that merry Saturday I had been busily at work, “ at nothing,” Aunt Martha said, but I was unwilling to agree with her. It seemed very necessary to me that fresh cake should be made to honor his arrival, even though the box was well stored with it already ; and then I wouldn’t think of yielding my right to sweep and dust Richard’s room, even to Aunt Martha herself ; and one wreath, at least, of *arbor vitæ* must be fashioned — one Christmas wreath — for his room ; and Aunt Martha asserted that she never saw a wreath before that occupied so much time in making.

“I don’t believe he will even notice it,” she said.

“Oh, I am sure he will ! why not, auntie ? ” I asked in surprise. “It will make a change in that little room to have anything hung on the white walls.”

“He will soon make change enough there, without aid from Christmas wreaths,” she said, laughing.

Nevertheless, it was finished and suspended, greatly to the admiration of Nelly, at least, who came over in the afternoon on several little errands of her own invention ; among others, to see how the near approach of Christmas was affecting me, she said ; but the chief matter of discussion was Christmas at the Hall.

“Who will be there, I wonder ? ” she queried. “I suppose a good many of Mr. Ansdale’s own friends, whom no one knows. I hope we shall have a very merry day, don’t you ? Can I help you ? ”



“Help her!” laughed Aunt Martha. “Why, Nelly, she has had the greatest difficulty to find work to occupy her own hands. The Christmas wreath helped her a little.”

So, finding her services were not needed, Nelly flitted off once more. A careful little fairy she had become, knitting stockings by the wholesale for our village poor, and venturing out in the worst weather to carry them to their destination. That was not half; Nelly was changed into a worker, and was a deadly enemy to idleness of every kind.

So, Nelly gone, there was nothing to do but to sit down and watch for Richie; although Aunt Martha tried to convince me that it was very foolish to do so, as people always seem to delay when you watch for them. But I had something in my experience to contradict this idea; and, besides, I had a strange fancy that if anything occurred once in a certain place, it was likely

to be repeated there. And so many afternoons I had sat by the window of Richard's room, — affording a view of the road from the depot, — and seen him approach, that it seemed as if the very act of sitting by that window and watching must be potent to bring him.

“Foolish child!” said Aunt Martha, “he'll not be here for two hours; get your book and try to amuse yourself meanwhile.”

“But, auntie, the sun is setting now,” I said, gazing out over the hills and beyond the river, where the bright red globe was dropping into its golden cup, as the old Greeks fancied. What a pretty idea it was! I should almost like to believe it myself. But at least it sinks in a flood of golden light, shedding its parting glory over all the landscape beneath.

“What if the sun is setting?” she answered; “he always retires early in winter, and we have a long time before dark.”

“What a lovely evening, auntie!” I said. “Doesn’t the sun put you in mind just now of some tired laborer, going home after his long day’s work with such a red, heated face, — a dear, faithful laborer?”

“How very unpoetical and matter-of-fact, dear!” said Aunt Martha deprecatingly.

“Yes, I know it, but he made me think of that; how fast he always seems to sink, as soon as he gets behind that clump of pine-trees! I don’t want to read; sit down here and talk with me, while we watch for Richie.”

“What do you want to talk of, dear?” she asked, sitting down by me, while her silvery head was lighted by the soft glory of the sinking sun.

“Talk of what is in our minds and nearest our hearts, auntie dear: isn’t Richie the best boy you ever had anything to do with?”

“He is the only one,” she answered, smiling.

“Then of course there’s no comparison. Whom does Richie look like, auntie? our father or mother?”

“Not like your mother, love; you are more like her: you are growing like her in disposition too. Poor little Alice!” she said.

“I wonder if Richie looks as our father did?” I asked.

“I never saw your father, dear.”

“And he died so suddenly; did my mother have no last message from him?”

“None whatever, Bertie.”

“And no likeness?”

“None.”

“I think Richie must look like him,” I said thoughtfully.

“Your mother thought he would,” said auntie.

“ You were my grandmother’s only sister, weren’t you, Aunt Martha ? ”

“ Yes, Bertha, and a very dear sister she always was to me ; but I never saw her after her marriage.”

“ I think your father must have been very stern,” I said musingly, for I knew the story of old.

“ But he was always a good father to me,” said auntie.

“ Oh, see ! Aunt Martha, you were wrong ! ” I cried.

“ What, love ? ” she said.

“ Richie ! ” I cried, rushing heedlessly from the room, with a great desire to be the first to welcome him, and to have that walk from the corner all to myself.

I had an uncertain consciousness that Aunt Martha called to me to be sure and wear my shawl ; but, although I was far removed from a rebellious frame of mind, I scarcely thought what she was saying, and

ran bareheaded down the frozen road, right into Richard's arms.

"What a careless child!" he exclaimed, kissing me, and taking off his overcoat to wrap around me.

"You shan't do it, Richie," I said; "I am so very warm;" and so a struggle arose, in the midst of which, as we continued to walk along meanwhile, we naturally arrived at the gate, when Richie laughingly relented, and removed the coat, only to catch me up in his arms and carry me into the house.

Aunt Martha was waiting at the doorstep, with smiles of welcome and looks of reproof.

"I'm so glad to have you back!" she said; "come in by the fire and warm yourself. Bertha has been watching for you this hour."

"Expected the train to be an hour in advance, for your peculiar benefit, eh, May-

bird ? ” he said, seating himself before the fire. “ I saw you and auntie up at the window, and thought I’d have the pleasure of surprising you ; but I had hardly time to think so when I saw a wingless fairy flying down the road and lighting in my arms. You took my breath away, Bertie ; come here, dear, and let me look at you.” So I went and stood demurely before him to be looked at.

“ I don’t think you’re changed very much,” he said, “ in appearance at least ; the cold air has given you roses.”

“ And you too, dear,” said Aunt Martha, going up behind him and stroking his hair. “ Did you come home for the Christmas pies we were speaking of last August ? ”

“ To be sure,” he said laughingly ; “ the time has flown away at last ; it seemed then almost as if it never would. But I have

been so busy ;” and he passed his hand thoughtfully over his brow.

“ Been studying very hard, Richie ? ” I asked.

“ Yes ; I shall be all ready to enter college in the fall, if I only may go ; ” and he glanced a little anxiously at Aunt Martha, who was flitting around the room, hither and thither, closing the shutters and drawing the curtains. I looked at her too ; I knew very well though that Richie would have his wish if she were able to grant it.

Richard said no more on the subject, but, bending down over me, he whispered softly, “ Standing by our colors still, Maybird ? ” I looked up and met his eye.

“ Oh, Richie ! I was very, very much to blame,” I said.

“ I do not blame you,” he answered ; “ I know myself how hard it is always to do one’s duty.”



“But you do it, Richie,” I insisted; “I am sure you do.”

“Not always, I am afraid. We will help each other, Bertie; I am an unprofitable servant, I fear.”

That was a very pleasant evening, although I don't remember that we did anything but exercise our gift of speech; and we seemed to vie with each other as to who should say the most, — that is to say, Richie and I; Aunt Martha seemed quite content with lying on the sofa and watching us, while Richard had thrown himself on the carpet by her side, — Aunt Martha had named him her “carpet knight,” — and I had my old stool at the foot of the couch.

There was a deal to tell, especially concerning the invitation to the Hall, which was a subject of vast import to me at that time. But Richard failed to view the question in its most pleasing light at first, and

insisted that he would greatly prefer remaining at home with Aunt Martha and me. But I assured him very eagerly that the invitation had been accepted, and that it would hardly be kind or polite in him to refuse.

“And I am sure you will like Mr. Ansdale, Richard,” I concluded; “and besides, even if you stay at home for the sake of Aunt Martha’s company and mine, you won’t have it, for we are both going to the Hall.”

Richard laughed and shrugged his shoulders, — “Very possibly he might like Mr. Ansdale, but he much preferred certainties, for his part, and he was sure of having agreeable company at home if we would only stay with him.”

“Richard will change his mind by to-morrow,” said Aunt Martha, quietly smiling at him; she was almost as glad as I to get

him back, and very proud of him too, I could see.

And so our first evening passed ; and I could scarcely sleep that night for the happiness in my heart.



## CHAPTER XI.

### *CHRISTMAS AT THE HALL.*

**A**UNT MARTHA was quite right, after all, and Christmas morning found Richard almost as much interested as myself in the proposed visit to Ans-  
dale Hall; so that long before I was ready to start he was walking up and down in the garden, waiting impatiently for me to join him.

The excitement of Richard's arrival had given Aunt Martha one of her old nervous headaches, which her night's rest had failed to relieve, and she deliberated a long while whether she should go with us or not; but after keeping very quiet all the

morning, until the pain was greatly lessened, she concluded to join the party.

We had a pleasant, brisk walk together, over the frozen roads, for it was still quite early in the day when we started, and the sun, though very bright, was a Christmas sun after all, and had done little work as yet, excepting to gild and beautify the icependants and snow-drifts. But the day was a peerless one, the very day that one could wish for Christmas, with the deep white snow under foot, — the fresh-fallen gift of our Christmas eve, and the purest of all gifts, next to that which was sent us nearly twenty centuries ago, — while the trees all sparkled with jewels, in exchange for their golden leaves, and shook their branches in a merry crisp fashion over our heads.

Mr. Ansdale had not invited us to a late fashionable dinner, after the usual order of Christmas entertainments, but he had ap-

pointed the old-time hour of two, with an urgent invitation, extended to all his guests, to anticipate the meal by two or three hours, which, for my part, I was not indisposed to do.

Our little village was really alive with sleighs, and these were loaded with very merry occupants, we thought; and I was so excited by the cold air and the music of the sleigh-bells that I should have enjoyed a walk quite through the village, had it not been for arriving late at the Hall.

I need have had no dread of that, however, for we were the first among the guests to enter the great, old-fashioned parlor, unless, indeed, I except two strange gentlemen from the city, who had arrived at the Hall two evenings before, and in whose presence I was quite afraid to speak to Mr. Ansdale as I usually did. So, without waiting an introduction, I withdrew to the front window, opening on the road,

where Nelly and I had often discussed school and stocking affairs, and there I seated myself to watch for her.

But Richard was far from sharing my diffidence ; much to my joy, he seemed at home with Mr. Ansdale from the moment that gentleman first spoke to him, and sat and talked as freely with the three gentlemen as though he had known them all his life. Not that he put himself forward in any way, or that he took a very large share in the conversation, — I should not have liked that at all, — but he was at his ease with these wise gentlemen, and interested too.

For myself, I found full pleasure in watching the progress of affairs around me, a pleasure alloyed only by the absence of Nelly. At length, in looking out at the beautiful Christmas day, I began to think in a musing way of the King who was born on Christmas so very long ago, — purer

than the snow and brighter than the sunlight.

After a little general conversation Mr. Ansdale led Aunt Martha off to the other parlor, to look at some strange piece of painting or sculpture, and Richard, not at all abashed by this desertion, soon became greatly interested in a discussion with one of the stranger gentlemen; and I was presently aroused from my thoughts by seeing the other approach my window.

“Are you trying to be alone in a crowd, little lady?” he said pleasantly, taking a view of the road from over my head; “you have a retiring disposition; is it so? or a meditative one?”

Richard’s merry laugh reached me at that moment, and I answered that I had been amusing myself with watching the others, until I had fallen to thinking.

“Watching others has been my entertainment of late,” said my companion;



“a very pleasant occupation when one is traveling, but not quite so diverting in your case, I should think. I should have preferred looking at the snow, after all. Are you fond of sleighing?”

To which I answered warmly in the affirmative.

“You need to find something of that kind to keep you alive in this quiet little village,” he continued; “I suppose you are somewhat troubled as it is to while away the time. Am I right?”

“No, sir; I think not. I have too much to do to have to find means of whiling away the time. It flies very fast, I assure you.”

I saw his eyes sparkle merrily; perhaps he imagined I was constructing mountains out of molehills, in the matter of my duties.

“It is a comfort,” he said, drawing up a chair to the window and seating himself

therein, "to find some one occasionally who is not trying to kill time."

"Do you try, sir?" I asked, a little wonderingly.

"I confess I have been guilty of it," he answered, smiling; "but I have learned better of late. And now, since I have confessed so much, my little friend, tell me what you were thinking of when I came up, which gave such a grave look to your eyes."

I blushed and was silent a moment, for I felt greatly averse to talking to this strange gentleman about those sober thoughts of mine, and I was going to pass it off with a light word or two, when I thought that even in such a little thing as that I might confess or deny my Lord, stand up for my colors or desert them; and so I answered, very low, and trembling a little, —

"I was thinking of what happened so

many years ago in Bethlehem, sir, on a Christmas morning."

He was silent a moment, and I was fearful of raising my eyes to his face; but at length he said, very kindly, laying his hand on mine, —

"That is what we all should have in mind this Christmas morning; you are a brave little girl. God bless you!"

And I saw that he knew, after all, what a struggle it had been for me to say those few little words; but whether he did or not, I felt thankful that I had conquered myself.

He had commenced telling me something, I almost forget what, when we both turned at an exclamation of delight from our host, who was shaking hands warmly with another gentleman, — a tall, sun-burnt stranger, who seemed to be exceedingly welcome.

"You are the very last one I expected

to have honor me to-day," said Mr. Ansdale joyfully. "I scarcely supposed you were breathing American air. Mrs. Grey, let me introduce to you an old friend, who was my companion in India for five years."

Aunt Martha went through the introduction very quietly, and seemed not the least concerned about Mr. Ansdale's traveling friend ; indeed, I thought she looked wearied, as though her headache were attacking her anew. But I saw Richard look searchingly first at Mr. Ansdale and then at his stranger friend, as though a new idea had suddenly burst upon him ; and he presently slipped over to my window, just as Mrs. Winsley entered to monopolize Aunt Martha.

"Bertha," he whispered in my ear, "you never told me Mr. Ansdale had been in India at all."

"I couldn't tell you everything in one day, Richie," I said lightly ; "he has never

spoken much of it,—only mentioned it casually once or twice.”

So Richard fell to thinking for a few moments, while the stranger, to say the truth, made himself vastly at home. He was certainly a treasure at a Christmas party, for his voice was the cheeriest and merriest in the room, while his laugh alone seemed potent to draw forth echoing peals from all the company. Mr. Ansdale shrank into a willing obscurity, while his friend gave glowing accounts of Indian jungles, wonderful dangers, and hair-breadth escapes. While he was in the midst of a marvelous story, giving a thrilling account of some one's adventure with some wild animal,—I forget what; Richard could tell far better than I, for he had aroused from his reverie, and was enchained, eyes and ears,—Mr. Ansdale came quietly over to our window, and stood there in a very thoughtful mood.

I saw that he wanted to speak to Rich-

ard, but he probably judged it a difficult undertaking, as Richard was so absorbed as scarcely to heed his presence.

At length the strange gentleman concluded his story, and then, noticing for the first time what a very appreciative listener he had, he came over to speak to Richard.

“I think you have not introduced me to this young friend, Ansdale,” he said, holding out his hand to Richard with the utmost friendliness; “he puts me in mind of a face that I had somewhere in my memory, I forget where.”

“This is a nephew of Mrs. Grey,” said Mr. Ansdale quietly. “Richard Grey, is it not?” He seemed to speak in a half-questioning way, as though he doubted what he said; but Richard was so absorbed in tigers and jungles that he seemed quite forgetful, or careless, that Grey was Aunt Martha’s name, and not his own; indeed, I think he was only anxious for the introduc-

tion to be over that the gentleman might begin another marvelous story.

But I wondered greatly that Mr. Ansdale should never have heard our proper name, though indeed every one called us Grey in the village, and Richie quite liked the idea of having different names at school and at home, so Mr. Ansdale had taken it all for granted ; but I thought this was going a step too far.

“Richie, your name is not Grey,” I whispered softly.

“Oh ! that makes no difference,” he said indifferently.

“But, Richard,” I insisted aloud, “you have no reason to be ashamed of Norton.”

“Ah ! Norton, — I thought so,” said Mr. Ansdale, turning in an abrupt manner from the window and walking across the room.

“Well,” said the stranger, “I’m sure I’ve seen your face somewhere, my boy ;

but I have a poor memory, and the name doesn't bring it back ;" and then he began another story, which failed to interest Richard as the last had done, for he kept following Mr. Ansdale with his eyes, while that gentleman talked earnestly with Aunt Martha in another corner of the room.

I too wondered if Mr. Ansdale could have known our father in that strange, distant India.

I had been so interested within that I had forgotten to watch for Nelly, and was therefore quite surprised to see her enter the parlor at this moment, bright and rosy after her brisk walk. She came over and settled herself by my side immediately, as though that were by right her place.

"I'm sorry to be so late, Bertie," she said, "for I know you wanted me sadly ; but I have had so much to do, what with looking at my presents, in addition to all my other duties, and I felt so happy, that



I had scarcely sense to do anything. It makes me feel very thankful, Bertie, this bright Christmas morning, to think what God has done for me since last Christmas ; so I have been contrasting the two. I was very gay and lively then, — you know I am naturally so, — but I wasn't happy after all, while now I feel happy and merry too. I feel as though I couldn't do enough for my Saviour. Don't you think it was very kind in Mr. Ansdale to make me promise ? ”

“ Yes, very, Nelly,” I answered gently.

“ Bertie,” she whispered, “ who is that gentleman telling the strange story, which pleases Richard vastly, — the one so rough and sunburnt ? I like his face exceedingly, and I am sure he is very good too, — a very good man ; I can see it in his eyes and his pleasant smile. I like to read faces, Bertie.”

So I came to the conclusion that Mr.

Ansdale's friend must of necessity be a good man.

The time passed very pleasantly after that, for every one seemed happy, and tried to make others so, and there was nothing to prevent it from being a very merry Christmas; indeed, I ranked it as quite the happiest in my life.

After dinner, while we were preparing to leave, Mr. Ansdale put his arm over Richard's shoulder and walked up and down the great hall with him, talking quite low and earnestly, as though what he said were very important; and though Richard seemed grave, I saw that his cheek was flushed with excitement as well.

Then as we were leaving, and Mr. Ansdale shook hands with Richard, he said,—

“I shall see you to-morrow forenoon, then, my boy?” and Richard readily assented.

My curiosity was much excited at this,

yet I had my own thoughts on the subject, and resolved that Richard should tell me all by the sitting-room fire that evening; so I waited very patiently until we had finished our light supper and Huldah had retired to the kitchen; then I drew up my chair more closely to his, and asked, —

“What was Mr. Ansdale speaking of this afternoon, Richie?”

Aunt Martha was sitting on the opposite side of the fire with her knitting-work, and she sighed at this question, most unaccountably, I thought.

“I meant to tell you, Maybird,” said Richard eagerly. “Mr. Ansdale knew our father well when he was in India, and he recognized my face the moment he saw it; so I must look very like him, Bertie.”

“And did Mr. Ansdale see much of him?” I asked, leaning forward to look into Richie’s face.

“Yes, Maybird, but he did not know him

very long, I fancy, and he was not with him when he died. Mr. Ansdale will tell us all about it when he sees us again."

However, Richie continued to tell me all he knew, and auntie listened in silence.

"Was that all he said to you?" I asked at length, suspiciously.

"No, not all," he said, in an embarrassed way. "He gave me something to dream over before I speak of it even to you, Bertie;" and then Richard pleaded weariness, and left us for the night.



## CHAPTER XII.

### *THE NEW HOME.*

**T**HE sun arose in dazzling splendor the next morning. I watched it slowly mounting over the hills and the pine-trees, melting the frost-diamonds from the branches, and throwing a gilded luster over the surface of the snow. It was a warm sun for Christmas-time.

I was happy that morning; and I stood for a long time by my window, thinking everything very beautiful and bright, and wondering what I should do with myself while Richard was away; for he had promised Mr. Harold, one of the guests at the Hall, and one of Mr. Ansdale's stranger friends, that he would skate with him that

morning. This arrangement was a very unsatisfactory one to me, and I expected the morning would prove a stupid one, little imagining what wonderful things were destined to occur before the close of that short winter day,—wonderful at least to me.

He had been gone about half an hour, and I was busy arranging his room, when I heard Nelly's voice below. That voice was always a pleasing signal to me, wherever I might be, and always, as now, brought me quickly to her side.

“Bertie, I want you to go with me to the Hall. I have a drawing mania at present, and I have taken a strong fancy to copy that sweet little engraving Mr. Ansdale showed us yesterday,—that little girl with the kittens; you remember, don't you? I am confident he will lend it to me, for he couldn't very well refuse, you know. Besides, I want to ask him some questions

about that adventurous Indian friend : how he did talk ! ”

“ How you do talk ! ” said Huldah, as Nelly paused, out of breath ; “ I never see a girl run on so. Bertha promised she’d read a bit to me sometime to-day. ”

“ So I will, Huldah ; this very afternoon, ” I said ; “ only be patient, and let me go now. ”

Huldah turned off with a sigh. What was the matter with the girl, I wondered. There seemed some trouble in her face, which I did not at the moment divine, but it worried me.

“ Huldah ! ” I cried, springing after her as she walked toward the kitchen, “ is anything the matter ? If you really want me to read to you this morning I will stay at home. ”

“ Oh ! no, go ; it don’t make no matter, ” she said, with unusual gentleness.

“But I would rather stay, if it makes any difference to you,” I said, lingering.

“It don’t make none. It’ll do just as well when you come home,” she said conclusively, waving me off with her hand. “I won’t listen if you stay, so go.”

“Huldah, you must tell me first what is the matter with you. I won’t go until you do.”

“’Tain’t nothin’,” she said; “I’m fetched up about myself, I s’pose. There’s so much bad in me I want to hear somethin’ good out o’ me.”

“I will read to you before I go, Huldah,” I said; and, resolutely fixed in my purpose, I followed her into the kitchen and took my accustomed seat. The little Bible was there, — it always rested on the kitchen mantel now, — and I read the story of our Saviour’s trial, and the denial of Peter in the judgment hall; of that gentle look of sorrow which the Saviour cast upon him,



and the bitter repentant tears of the erring disciple, — the disciple whose sin I myself was so prone to repeat. Huldah listened fixedly, and sighed when I concluded.

“He was mighty good to forgive Peter,” she said.

“He is very good to forgive all who repent.”

“I shouldn’t think he could’a stood that look,” she said musingly.

“Think that Christ is looking at you in the same way, Huldah ; that he was suffering for you when Peter denied him.”

“You go now,” she said hastily ; “you’ve give me somethin’ to think about.”

“Bertie !” Nelly’s sunny face peeped in at the door ; “I’ve waited so patiently ! What have you been doing ?”

“Only reading to Huldah.”

“Oh ! that’s all right. Have you finished ? Come, I am so anxious you should see your Christmas gift. Jack is deeply

engaged in his literary pursuits with Aunt Martha, but he has brought something for you ; and I'm very much afraid his sensibility will suffer, for I don't believe you will keep it ; I wouldn't."

Of course I was anxious to discover what mysterious article this might be, and we hastened to the sitting-room ; when Jack left his "literary pursuits," and presented me with his offering. It was a dear little captive snow-bird, caught through some incomprehensible means by my former scholar, and inclosed in a willow cage of his own manufacture, which, if it was rather rough, was still very ingenious. The poor little thing did not enjoy captivity, even though plentifully provided with the good things of this life, which Jack had strewn in his prison. He dashed his little body against the slender willow bars in the most piteous manner, and seemed to look pleadingly up into my face.

“Jack, it was kind in you to think of me, very kind ; I thank you ever so much. The cage is right pretty ; did you make it yourself ? ”

“ Yes, ma’am,” he said, with brightening eyes.

“ It is very nice ; but don’t you think the dear little birdie feels unhappy ? ”

“ Don’t like bein’ shet up, I guess,” said the donor, with a merry twinkle in his eye.

“ We wouldn’t either, would we, Jack ? ”

“ Oh ! he’ll git used to it,” said Jack.

My mind took a rapid journey in search of some other use to which to devote the little willow cage.

“ Who taught you to make the cage, Jack ? Do you know what I would like to do with it in place of keeping this dear little bird in it ? ”

“ No, ma’am,” he said, with a crestfallen air.

“ I have a pretty little vine in my room,

with nothing to keep it in ; I should like to let birdie go, and keep this cage for my little vine to twine around ; and every time you come I can take you up to see how it is growing.”

This proposition pleased him vastly ; and the snow-bird was released from his thrall-dom forthwith, to seek his breakfast on the pure white ground, while the cage was prepared for another destiny. Then Nelly and I went to the Hall.

Mr. Ansdale was not alone in the library, for the “ adventurous Indian friend ” was seated by his side in earnest conversation ; and though Mr. Ansdale received us warmly, as he always did, yet I had a disagreeable consciousness of being an intruder on a pleasant conversation. He did not address us again for some time, but conversed in a low tone with his guest, while Nelly made free with his portfolio of engravings, — an established privilege with her, — look-

ing for the picture she had set her heart upon. Finally Mr. Ansdale turned toward me abruptly.

“Bertie, where is Richard to-day?” he asked.

“He promised Mr. Harold to skate with him this morning, but he will be here before long, sir,” I answered.

“Ah! I remember,” he said, turning once more to his guest. Half an hour slipped away, a very amusing one to Nelly, no doubt, for a portfolio of engravings was a most absorbing thing to her; but I was weary, and wanted Mr. Ansdale to talk to me. Finally Nelly touched my arm.

“See, Bertie,” she said, “is it not sweet? I am sure he will let me take it.”

“Very pretty, Nelly,” I answered, “and I don’t doubt he will lend it you,—but hark! what is that?” for there was a great noise of opening and shutting doors below, heavy feet passing through the hall and up

the staircase, while a voice, louder than the rest, reached our ears, —

“In the library ; he’s in the library !”

Mr. Ansdale started to his feet at that, and at the same moment the library door was flung open. There were two gentlemen ; I recognized Mr. Harold in a moment as one of them ; and they were carrying Richard in their arms. I sprang forward eagerly, but Mr. Ansdale drew me aside, and helped, himself, to carry Richard to the sofa.

“He has had a fall on the ice,” I heard Mr. Harold whisper hurriedly ; “he is only stunned, I think.”

Then I stationed myself at the head of the couch, firmly resolved that not even Mr. Ansdale should send me away. There seemed a great confusion to me, with people running hither and thither, all trying to do a great deal, and really effecting nothing. But Mr. Ansdale was perfectly calm,

as he loosened Richard's clothes, bathed his forehead, and drew down the blind to let the cool air blow upon him. I had never seen Mr. Ansdale's face with that expression on it before,—so greatly excited and yet so composed. He never once left his side, until Richard opened his eyes and looked around him with a smile.

“Did I fall?” he asked, attempting to rise, but kept down by Mr. Ansdale's hand. “How droll! but I don't believe it has hurt me. Are you here, little Maybird?” and he smiled lovingly as he glanced around at me.

By that motion and those words of Richard I realized that he was not really in danger, and I felt very like crying when the fear was lifted from my heart, and the thankfulness filled its place; so I slipped away from his side in a moment and out into the conservatory beyond, for I wanted to be alone; and there I fell on my knees

among the sweet flowers and burst into tears, thanking God that he had spared my brother's life, and that he had given us such a true friend as Mr. Ansdale to love.

I don't know how long I remained there, for, strangely enough to myself, I felt like being alone, when the door was opened gently, and I heard a step behind me.

"My little Bertie!" said Mr. Ansdale very tenderly, and as I rose from my knees he put his arm around me, and pressed me closely to his heart. "My little Bertie, Richard has been promising me that if you are willing he will come and live at the Hall, and let me be his father, in so far as I can. What do you say? will you come, and give me a little home comfort after my wearisome life?"

I looked up wonderingly in his face, and shook my head slowly.

"It is all very strange," I said; "why do you want us?"



“Why do I want you, Bertie?” and he smiled securely, as though he were sure of having me, after all; “because I love you, and I shall soon love Richard as well; because you can both make me very happy, and I you, I think.”

“But Aunt Martha,” I said wistfully; “I never shall leave Aunt Martha, Mr. Ansdale.”

“Dear little Bertie,” he said; “did you think we had left Aunt Martha out of our plans? I had a long talk with her yesterday; and I think you can persuade her to come to the Hall: she sees it will be best for you.”

“Dear Mr. Ansdale,” I said, “I am so glad!”

“And I want one little favor of you, Bertie,—will you learn to call me ‘father,’ in memory of that other father whom we both loved? Only one little girl has ever

called me by that name, and it is very sweet to me, Bertie."

"Oh, yes!" I said; "I am quite bewildered, and don't understand it at all: did you just think of it this morning, sir?"

He smiled, a strange sort of a smile, I thought.

"I have thought that I wanted *you*, Bertie, since our first Macaulay-lesson; and I have grown more confident of it every day. I had little doubt, too, that I could persuade you to come to me, were it not for that dear brother of yours, and I had no heart to part you in any way."

"But you will love Richard dearly for himself," I said eagerly.

"*Dearly*, little Bertie," he affirmed, with a kindly smile. "I have been well prepared to love him for a long while; and if not, I should have tolerated him, for the sake of my *little daughter*. And when I found who your father was, I proposed ~~the~~

plan to him at once. Though he demurred a little at first, I think he is pleased."

"I am sure he is," I said musingly, "if Aunt Martha only will come."

Then we went back to Richard, who was still lying on the sofa, as much at home apparently as though he had lived in Ansdale Hall all his life, and fully realizing his new position, which, for my part, I was far from doing. It was rather strange to me that he had assented so easily; but Mr. Ansdale had quite won his heart.

And while we sat talking it over together, Mr. Ansdale's "Indian friend" came back again, and when he learned the state of affairs seemed to take it as a matter of course, and congratulated us each in turn. It seemed that Mr. Ansdale had told him everything before, and explained the mystery of Richard's face; but he had seen little of our father, and had forgotten him, among the multitude of strange faces

he was always meeting in his travels. But Mr. Ansdale told us all about him, what a noble, generous heart he had, and how well he had served his country in that distant land.

“And did he ever speak of us?” asked Richard at length.

“I remember his speaking of your mother with a full heart more than once, after receiving a letter from England, and of some little ones whom he was longing to see; but he was naturally reserved, and showed little of his inner life to those around him. It was about six months from the time that I parted with him that I heard of his death; then I was in England again.”

So the morning had quite slipped away in our talking, and Richard became perfectly at home in the library, although he had never entered it before; and I began to think that he regarded Mr. Ansdale as fa-

miliarly as though he were our own brave father, returned after many years.

He was not much hurt by his fall after all, and assured me that he would have been off the sofa long ago, were it not for the mere pleasure of resting there; and that he was ready to skate whenever Mr. Harold would join him. But, fortunately for Richard, that gentleman was in his room, writing letters, and would leave that afternoon, notwithstanding Mr. Ansdale's urgent invitation that he would remain.

"I must go home and tell Aunt Martha," I said at length, suddenly starting from my seat by the sofa, and remembering that she had been alone all the morning; "but Richie can stay here."

"I will let you go on one condition: that you bring Aunt Martha back with you in half an hour," said Mr. Ansdale.

To which condition I readily agreed, and was permitted to go on my errand.

I was quite breathless when I arrived at our cottage, and paused a moment to collect my senses after Huldah had opened the door. If I had not been so greatly excited I might have noticed the unusual smile that greeted me, but I only asked, "Where is Aunt Martha?"

"Be you sick, dear?" she asked.

"Oh, no, Huldah! but I have something strange to tell you; come into the sitting-room."

Aunt Martha was knitting by the fire-side, with that sweet look of placid content on her face that she always wore now, and she looked up with a bright smile to greet me; and I could only cry, winding my arms around her neck, "Auntie, auntie, are you quite willing Mr. Ansdale should be our father?"

And auntie smiled and stroked my hair, while Huldah clapped her hands in congratulation.

“I know it is for your good, dear,” said auntie.

And so I sat down and talked it all over, quite forgetting my promise. until the great clock warned me.

“Auntie! we must go back; he said so.”

Aunt Martha could refuse me nothing. Huldah ran up for her bonnet and shawl, and I helped her put them on.

“We will be back before very long, Huldah,” I said, as we passed out of the door.

“You needn’t to be afeard of leavin’ me now. I shan’t be lonesome,” she said, with a peculiar smile; and I knew by her face that Huldah had cast her burden upon the Lord.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### CONCLUSION.

**W**E had a merry time that evening in the dear old library ; it had never seemed so pretty and cozy to me before, for it had never been *home*, our own home. I entered immediately into all my rights ; assumed to myself the task of dropping the curtains, and drawing my father's easy-chair to the fire, receiving a kiss as I seated myself at his feet.

Nelly was there too, — dear little Nelly. She seemed to feel perfectly happy in the joy of others, and most earnestly implored to be often admitted into that literary retreat as a member of the family, she said. It was not the literary character of the



above apartment that lent it a charm for Nelly; she had no ambition to renew her acquaintance with Macaulay, from the day she discarded him. So I came to the conclusion that the living attractions, together with sweet associations and pleasant hours, painted a halo around the old library walls for Nelly.

Richie had lighted the gas, and had drawn his chair up to the fireside intent on the completion of a projected machine, for some wonderful purpose that I never fully understood, but which was warmly encouraged by Mr. Ansdale, greatly to Richard's joy. Poor boy! he had never found any one at home who could enter into or appreciate his plans, and he hailed with delight this new sympathy. Moreover, Richard had his wish: he was going to college. I had touched the subject inadvertently in our conversation, and Richie's newly-found sympathizer had instantly taken it up.

“Do you want to enter college, my boy?” he asked.

“Yes, sir,” said Richard emphatically.

“And if you once enter you will be sure to go through with honor?” he questioned.

“You will not disappoint me if you go, and God spares your life?”

“No, indeed!” said Richard with assurance. “God helping me, you shall never be ashamed of me.

“I was not afraid of that,” said Mr. Ansdale, “but I would rather, my boy, you never entered college than that you should merely graduate with superficial knowledge, gained by but little attention to your books: but I am sure you will not do that; you shall go if you will. But where?”

“To Dartmouth, sir,” said Richard promptly.

“Be it so. I shall oppose no obstacle; and I hope to be proud of you yet.”

“But I am very proud of him now,” I said in a deprecatory tone. “He couldn’t be much better than he is.”

Richard caught me in his arms at that, and kissed me a dozen times in his great joy at realized hopes and my warm defense, joined together; while Mr. Ansdale smiled indulgently.

“Yes, Richard is a good boy,” he said.

“Richard never gives any trouble,” said Aunt Martha, most sincerely; for black footprints, disordered rooms, and tumbled curtains were quite forgotten at the moment, or, better still, sunk into insignificance. “Richie is a dear boy;” which assertion was bountifully rewarded by the person under discussion.

“And now,” said Mr. Ansdale, bending down and speaking softly to me, “Can’t we persuade Aunt Martha to quit the old house and take up her abode at Ansdale Hall?”

“ Oh ! auntie, of course you will.”

“ What is that, dear ? ”

“ You will come here to live all the time, and bring Huldah with you ? ” — the latter clause being an amendment of my own.

“ Why, my love,” she began hesitatingly, “ I don’t know.”

“ Ah ! but I know, Aunt Martha ; I know you could never live happily without Richard and me.”

“ That is very true, my dear,” she answered ; “ but it would be like tearing out my heart to leave the dear old home ; though I am willing to give you up, when I know it is for your good.”

“ There can be no question in regard to your being with the children,” said Mr. Ansdale kindly ; “ I never meant to rob you of them ; you must certainly live at the Hall. But why not keep possession of the old place, and let the whole family, our lit-

tle Nelly included, favor it with periodical visits ? ”

This was hailed with great applause, and Aunt Martha rested satisfied, giving her full and cordial consent to take up her abode at the Hall.

“Richie and I never imagined last summer, when we were admiring those dear old ivied windows, and wondering how the library looked beyond them, that the Hall would be our home so soon,” I said, looking up at our new father in the firelight.

“Nor I,” he answered smiling, “when I rescued a certain perplexed little maiden from a labyrinth of blackberry-bushes. And now let us thank God together for the happiness he has given me.” And we knelt around the fireside, while he implored the blessing and protection of “our Father who art in heaven ;” and I felt the hand that clasped mine tremble as I knelt by his side.

“Bertie, darling,” he whispered, as he

kissed me when we parted for the night, "I hope you may be very happy in your new home; that God will give us all strength to serve him as we should, and never to forget that we do not belong to ourselves or to each other, but to him who loved us, and gave himself for us."

And I remembered Richie's motto, and asked God for strength to enable me to do everything for his glory in my new home; for, I thought, it is not always when much love is granted us, and all things move smoothly and softly, that we are nearer God and heaven; but it takes trial, hardships, and neglect to draw our hearts to God's heart, and make the Saviour precious; even as hard words and cold looks make the wandering child weep for its home. But God gives us our blessings, and it was his help that I asked that first night in my new home, that he would ever make all his blessings pure to me for Jesus' sake.









